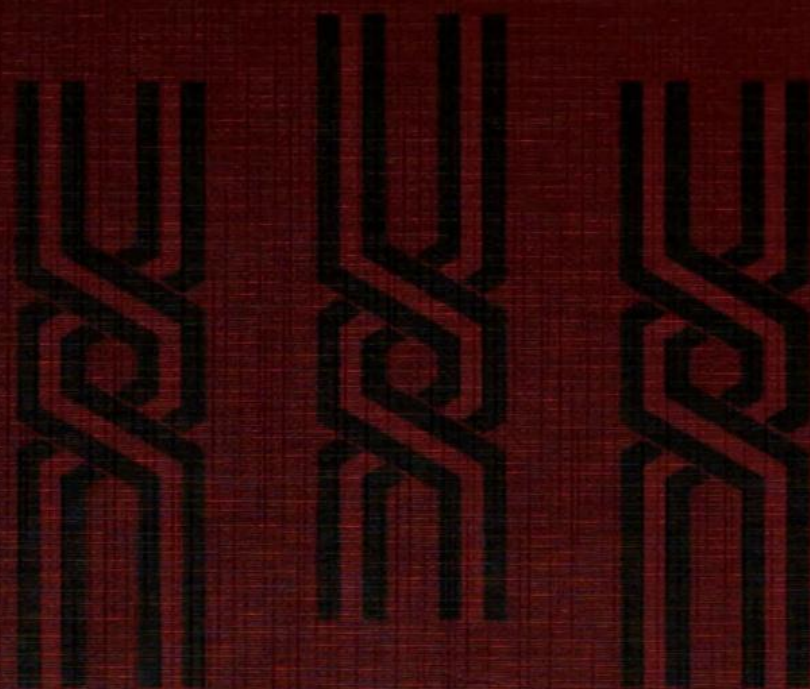


Laylī and Majnūn

LOVE, MADNESS AND MYSTIC LONGING

IN NIẒĀMĪ'S EPIC ROMANCE



ALI ASGHAR SEYED-GOHRAB

LAYLĪ AND MAJNŪN

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BY

ALI ASGHAR SEYED-GOHRAB



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In memory of my father

CONTENTS

Preface	xi
Notes on translations, transliterations and abbreviations	xiii
Acknowledgements	xv
Chapter One: Introduction	
1. Studies of the concept of love	1
2. Medieval Persian views on love	5
Chapter Two: "Nizāmī, the world's word-magician"	
1. The poet and his work	25
2. Nizāmī's language and style	30
3. The narrator's stance in <i>Laylī and Majnūn</i>	40
4. The romance's structure, metre and origin	50
5. The narrator's sources	55
6. The prologue and epilogue	57
Chapter Three: Characters and lovers	
1. Characters in 'Udhrite love poetry	63
2. The character of Majnūn prior to Nizāmī's era	69
3. Nizāmī's Majnūn	74
Chapter Four: The lover's outward appearance	
1. Majnūn's physical description	79
2. Majnūn and the snake	81
3. Majnūn and the kingdom of plants	84
Chapter Five: The ascetic and the lover	
1. Majnūn's asceticism	89
2. Vegetarianism and denial of food	92
3. Rejecting clothing	101
4. Avoiding speech	104
5. Sleep deprivation	107
6. Majnūn's alienation from human society	109

Chapter Six: "The king of love"	
Majnūn's kingship and his bond with animals	115
Chapter Seven: "When they love, they die"	
Majnūn's love-death	127
Chapter Eight: "Madness may serve a purpose"	
1. Approaches to the madness of Majnūn	139
2. Majnūn's possession	145
3. The limits of reason	147
4. Majnūn as a rational madman	149
Chapter Nine: "Majnūn, the black starred"	
1. Majnūn's fate	161
2. Theological concepts of fate	162
3. The doctrine of <i>maṣlaḥa</i>	163
4. Majnūn's free will, <i>ikhtiyār</i>	167
5. Cosmogonical concepts signifying Majnūn's fate	171
6. Time, <i>zamān</i> , <i>zamāna</i> as agents of destiny	172
7. Stars and lovers	174
8. Majnūn's <i>bakht</i> and <i>daulat</i>	180
9. Majnūn's fate based on gnostic principles	183
10. A web of fates	185
Chapter Ten: "Pearls scattered from the lips"	
1. Majnūn's poetic genius	187
2. Poetry as a mirror of Majnūn's psychological states	190
3. Varium et mutabile semper femina	198
4. The elegiac monologue	206
5. Majnūn's celebrity as a poet and transmitters of his poetry	207
6. Conclusions	210
Chapter Eleven: The ideal beloved	
1. Majnūn's relationship with Laylī	213
2. The beloved's quality and the experience of falling in love	215
3. Religious vocabulary describing the lovers' relationship	227
4. Laylī as the mirror of the universe	234

5. Laylī, the ideal beloved	237
6. An incarcerated heroine	243
7. Laylī's imposed marriage	251
8. Meetings between Laylī and Majnūn	258
9. Conclusions	267
Chapter Twelve: "Your feet are my crown"	
1. Majnūn's parental relation	271
2. Majnūn and his father	275
3. Majnūn and his mother	284
4. Majnūn's relation to Laylī's father	294
Chapter Thirteen: Of love, chivalry and war	
Majnūn's relationship with the chivalrous Naufal	299
Chapter Fourteen: "The time of falling leaves"	
1. Time and setting in <i>Laylī and Majnūn</i>	311
2. Night as the marker of time and as a background	314
3. Day as the marker of time and as a background	319
4. The garden as the ornament of the setting	322
5. War as a setting	329
6. The symbolic significance of the cave and the desert	330
Conclusion	337
Bibliographical references	341
Primary sources	341
Secondary sources	345
Index	359

PREFACE

From my early childhood I have been intrigued by the figure of Majnūn. It was my mother who first told me stories about Majnūn's amazing pure love. She told anecdotes about him and whispered poems about Majnūn in my ear during the siesta. At that time, of course, I was not aware of the significance of Majnūn's character, his idealized love-madness, his paradoxes, or why his image and stories were everywhere, from songs and proverbs to the splendid designs on vases, dishes, tiles, miniature paintings, and in the fine images on one carpet that showed Majnūn half-naked, embracing a little gazelle. For a long time, I was even convinced that Majnūn was his true name. It was only when I grew older that I found out that Majnūn's real name was Qays and that he received the nickname *majnūn* 'madman' (literally 'possessed by a jinn') when he was smitten by his love for Laylī, but was rejected by Laylī's father. The separation from his love proved too hard for Majnūn, and he abandoned human society, roaming the desert naked night and day, and singing love poems for Laylī. These were only the limited glimpses of Majnūn that are usually retold in family gatherings. As a child I did not know that these anecdotes were from the grand epic tale by the twelfth-century poet Nizāmī of Ganja who paid a moving tribute to Majnūn's love and mysticism, versifying Majnūn's entire life-story, which even at that time was so much part of Persian culture, for the first time.

The plot of the story is simple. Qays falls in love with Laylī at school. When Laylī's father finds out about their love, he forbids any contact between the lovers. The separation only increases Qays' love to the point of madness and he is nicknamed *majnūn*. Later, he becomes so disillusioned with the community of men that he leaves society and roams the desert naked among the beasts, living in a cave. In the desert, he avoids sleeping and eating meat, only contemplating the thought of Laylī and composing love songs for her. When people's sympathy for him and their attempts to unite him with Laylī fail, Majnūn gives up all hope of union. Meanwhile, Laylī's father gives her in marriage against her will, but Laylī remains virgin and faithful to Majnūn, even secretly arranging meetings with

him. During these meetings, they only sing poetry from a distance. Several years later, when Laylī's husband dies and Majnūn has the chance to marry her, he is so focused on the ideal picture of Laylī that he cannot see her any more, and runs to the desert. Soon after, Laylī dies and is put into a grave in her bridal dress. When Majnūn hears this, he runs to her grave and instantly dies. The lovers are then buried side by side. Later, someone dreams that the lovers were united in the gardens of Paradise, living as a king and queen.

When I was an eleven year old boy, the teacher at school told us children's versions of this poem and we were asked to write essays on this lover's tale explaining what we liked best. The children in my class all came up with different aspects: some liked Majnūn for his love of animals, some felt sorry for him because of Laylī's horrible father, and yet others liked him because of his funny behaviour. I wrote then that I liked the story best because of Majnūn's perseverance, but I did not like him since he rejected Laylī at the end. Although I did not understand much of Majnūn's conduct or his controversial character at the time, I was certainly intrigued. Majnūn has stayed with me and now, more than twenty years after this little boy's essay, I am still fascinated—but I do understand a little more about him. This book presents an analysis of Majnūn's character, his mystical love and his relationship with Laylī and other characters. I have tried to outline how the notion of love, as depicted in Nizāmī's romance, is seen through Persian eyes, and to explain the close relationship between mystical love and Majnūn.

NOTES ON TRANSLATIONS, TRANSLITERATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

In translating passages from Persian sources, an attempt has been made to remain as close to the original as possible. Therefore, the English version lacks the artistic refinement and the poetic elegance of the original. As R.A. Nicholson has said, to translate Persian poems is to "break their melody and bring their soaring passion down to earth."¹ Niẓāmī's romance is known for its intricate use of language and ambiguity. In my translations, I have selected that meaning of the original which is essential for my analysis.² The translations from Niẓāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn* are based on the edition by A.A. Alizada, published in Moscow in 1965. In most cases I have translated the Persian third person pronoun *ū* with 'she' when it refers to the beloved. Although the same pronoun is used in writing about homosexual love, I have chosen 'she' to avoid confusion. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

As far as transliterations of Persian and Arabic words are concerned, I have followed the system used by *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Persian names and words occurring in quoted titles retain the original orthography. The orthography of Persian proper names is retained except where the person has adopted a particular spelling in a European language. In such cases I use two different spellings for one name. For instance, I write Pourjavady where the name is spelled thus, and Pūrjawādī in Persian sources. In the bibliography, the works of each author are put together under the Persian variant of his or her name.

The solar and lunar years of the Perso-Islamic calendar are retained in Persian sources in the footnotes, but in the bibliographical references both the Perso-Islamic and Gregorian calendar are given.

All references to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* are from the second edition. In footnotes *op. cit.* is avoided; instead short titles are given.

¹ R.A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, London: Arkana, 1989, p. 106.

² For various aspects of translating Persian poetry see E. Yarshater, "Approaches to the Translation of Persian Poetry" in *Acta Iranica: Papers in Honour of Professor Jes P. Asmussen*, Vol. 12, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988, pp. 259-73.

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Also my heartfelt thanks go out to many people who have supported me in several ways during my research. I feel a deep sense of gratitude and obligation towards Professor Hans de Bruijn, who has been an excellent teacher, guiding me with generosity. My gratitude also goes to Professor Johan ter Haar whose door has always been open for me, answering my questions with kindness. Also I want to thank my students whose enthusiasm, diligence and critical questions made me rethink about several ideas elaborated in this book. I am pleased to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to my friend and colleague Kamil Banak, who has always been most supportive. I thank him for everything, particularly for his translations from Russian texts. Also I extend my feelings of deep gratitude to my friends Sen McGlinn and Drs. Ronald Kon for their editorial assistance and invaluable suggestions.

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My thanks are due to all colleagues of the department of Languages and Cultures of the Islamic Middle East (TCIMO) who have always been most kind and supportive in different ways, particularly Professor Harry Stroomer, Professor Leon Buskens, and Monique Heeg.

My thankfulness goes out to Miriam, my mother, brother and friends for their unabated love.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. *Studies of the concept of love*

In contrast to studies of medieval European literatures, in which the concept of love has been thoroughly investigated, there have been only a few studies on this topic in the rich medieval literature of the Muslim peoples. Especially with regard to Persian literature, the scarcity of this kind of research is so obvious that one may speak of a lacuna in medieval literary studies. The desirability of a study of love in Persian literature becomes evident as one delves into the impact of the Persians on the literature of the Muslim peoples on the one hand, and the striking similarities between various aspects of love in medieval Persian and European romances on the other hand.¹

Scholarly research in the field of Oriental Studies has been chiefly directed at the notion of love in Arabic literature.² In 1933, H. Ritter called the attention of students of Arabic and Persian to this compelling subject in his article "Philologika VII" in which he introduced twelve Arabic works on profane love and 28 Persian and Arabic treatises on mystical love.³ He attempted to complete his list of writings of this type in his introduction to Ibn Dabbāq's *Mashāriq anwār al-qulūb*, in which he classified thirteen treatises on profane

¹ There are close similarities between romances such as *Warqa and Gulshāh* and *Florys and Blaunchefflower*, and the oriental elements in *Florys* are very strong. See *Florys and Blaunchefflower*, ed. F.C. de Vries, Groningen: V.R.B., 1966, pp. 63-66.

² For a review of studies on the genre of the theory of love in Arabic see L.A. Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love*, New York: New York University Press, 1971, pp. xi-xiii.

³ Hellmut Ritter "Philologika VII" in *Der Islam*, 21, 1933; idem, *Das Meer der Seele: Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Fariduddin 'Attār*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1955, pp. 504-74. For a list of Persian treatises on love see M.T. Dānīshpazhūh, "Rasā'il-i 'ishqī" in *Majmū'a-yi sukhānrānīhā*, Vol. 2, ed. H. Zarrīnkūb, Mashhad: Dānīshkada-yi adabī wa 'ulūm-i insāni-yi Mashhad, 1352, pp. 626-47; N. Pūrjawādī, "Risāla'ī dar bāra-yi 'ishq" in *Ma'ārif*, Vol. 6, No. 3, March 1990, pp. 105-11.

love and four tracts on mystical love, all in Arabic.⁴ Despite its usefulness, Ritter's list is far from complete, especially with regard to the rich tradition of mystical treatises on love. Ritter himself admits: "Dieser Literaturzweig ist so reich entwickelt, daß eine ausreichende Übersicht darüber sehr schwer zu erreichen ist."⁵

Much has changed since the publication of Ritter's famous article in 1933. There have been a number of philological studies on the concept of love in Arabic poetry. J.C. Vadet's study of various amatory themes in Arabic literature and their impact on medieval courtly love in Europe was published in 1968.⁶ L.A. Giffen introduced and discussed "twenty-odd" books on earthly love in her research in 1971. Eight years later, J.N. Bell undertook an ambitious enterprise, writing a book on the Hanbalite notion of love.⁷ In addition to these invaluable studies, a number of noteworthy case studies on the concept of love are available. These include W. Raven's *Ibn Dâwûd al-Iṣbahânî and his Kitâb al-Zahra* published in 1989, and S. Enderwitz's *Liebe als Beruf*, which appeared in 1995.⁸ This moderate list was recently enriched by Thomas Bauer's insightful study on Arabic love poetry, entitled *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts*.⁹

In addition to these monographs, dealing exclusively with the Arabic notion of love, a limited number of recent articles and books on the Persian view of love have contributed to a deeper understanding of this concept in the Islamic culture. A. Schimmel is among the few researchers to have considered the Persian concept of love, in *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* and in chapters in some of her other books.¹⁰ J. Scott Meisami's *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* treats the most

⁴ See 'Abd ar-Rahmân b. Muḥammad al-Anṣārî Ibn Dabbâq, *Mashâriq anwâr al-qulûb wa mafâtîḥ asrâr al-ghuyûb*, ed. H. Ritter, Beirut: Dâr Ṣâdir, 1379.

⁵ Hellmut Ritter "Philologica VII," p. 89.

⁶ J.C. Vadet, *L'esprit courtois en orient dans les cinq premiers siècles de l'Hégire*, Paris: Maisonneuve, 1968.

⁷ J.N. Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979.

⁸ W. Raven, *Ibn Dâwûd al-Iṣbahânî and his Kitâb al-Zahra*, Amsterdam: Ph.D. dissertation, 1989; S. Enderwitz, *Liebe als Beruf*, Beirut: Beirut Texts and Studies, Bd. 55, 1995.

⁹ T. Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998.

¹⁰ She devotes a chapter to love in each of the following books: *As Through a Veil*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, pp. 83-133; idem, *I Am Wind You are Fire*, London: Shambhala, 1992, pp. 173-94; idem, *The Triumphal Sun*, Albany:

important Persian secular romances as well as the genre of 'love lyric' (*ghazal*). F.D. Lewis analyses a corpus of Ḥakīm Sanā'ī's *ghazals* in his *Reading, Writing and Recitation: Sanā'ī and the Origin of the Persian Ghazal*. In this context one should also mention the recently published book, *Mediation and Love* by L. Rouhi in which the author studies the character of 'go-between' in "Near Eastern Texts."¹¹

Naṣrullāh Pūrjawādī's series of articles on mystical love, which have been translated into several languages, may be seen as a bridge between the Iranian and Western attempts at delineating the notion of love in Persian literature.¹² Furthermore, a number of books on this subject have been published in Persian. The majority of these focus on mystical love. Apart from the major invaluable studies on Sufism conducted by 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb,¹³ there are several studies on love. Mention should be made of Arzhang Midī, *Ishq dar adab-i Fārsī: az āghāz tā qarn-i shishum* (*Love in Persian Literature: From the Beginning to the Sixth Century A.H.*) published by the Institute for Cultural Study and Research in 1992. Sayyid Aḥmad Ḥusaynī Kāzīrūnī's *Ishq dar mathnawī-yi ma'nawī* (*Love in Mathnawī-yi ma'nawī*) is another attempt to handle the theme of love in Rūmī's *Mathnawī*. The author does not confine himself to Rūmī's book, but refers to other sources as well.¹⁴ Jalāl Sattārī is another researcher in this field who has written several studies on love, including *Ishq-i ṣūfiyāna* (*Sufi love*), *Dard-i 'ishq-i Ḥulaykhā* (*The Pangs of Ḥulaykhā's Love*), and *Hālāt-i 'ishq-i Majnūn* (*The States of Majnūn's Love*). In addition, there are some modern commentaries on classical texts, written in the classical style. One exponent of this style is Ḥishmat Allāh Riyādī who, in his *Āyāt-i ḥusn wa 'ishq* (*The Signs of Beauty and Love*), explains Aḥmad Ghazālī's *Sawānīh* chapter by chapter.¹⁵ J. Zamānzāda's *Rawān-kāwī-yi suwar-i*

State University of New York, 1978, pp. 332–52; idem, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975, pp. 130–48.

¹¹ Leyla Rouhi, *Mediation and Love*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999.

¹² Pūrjawādī's articles have been published in *Nashr-i Dānish* and in *Ma'ārif*; for his translations and scholarly contributions in English see Aḥmad Ghazālī, *Sawānīh: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits*, London: KPI, 1986; *Kings of Love*, Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978, which is co-authored by P. Lamborn Wilson.

¹³ It would go far beyond the scope of this book to name all the books of this particular scholar on Sufism. For the sake of convenience, I refer only to *Arzish-i mīrāth-i ṣūfiyya*, Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1353; *Bahr dar kūza*, Tehran: 'Ilmī, 1368; *Dunbāla-yi justjū dar taṣawwuf-i Irān*, Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1366; *Sirr-i nay*, 2 Vols., Tehran: 'Ilmī, 1374.

¹⁴ S.A. Ḥusaynī Kāzīrūnī, *Ishq dar mathnawī-yi ma'nawī*, Tehran, Zawwār, 1374.

¹⁵ H.A. Riyādī, *Āyāt-i ḥusn wa 'ishq*, 2 Vols., Tehran: Khāja, 1369.

‘ishq dar adabiyāt-i Fārsī (*Psychoanalytical Interpretations of all Aspects of Love in Persian Literature*) is another attempt to provide insight into the Persian concept of love from a totally different perspective.¹⁶ As the title promises, this book approaches a large number of *ghazals*, and romances from a psychoanalytical angle, although the analysis does not go beyond the surface level.

The majority of the Persian studies on love suffer from a lack of analytical depth and a systematic ordering and treatment of the enormous body of material that is often used. As regards the analysis of the romance, a key problem with Sattārī's and Zamānzāda's books, for instance, is that they often merely retell the story or different versions of a story in an abridged way, adding only short comments. What is more, the authors usually make no distinction between theoretical treatises and romances, and between schools of thought in which love treatises are written. It is indeed due to such superficial analyses that scholars such as N. Pūrjawādī have pointed to the desirability of conducting a thorough case study on love.¹⁷

The method on which the present study is based tries to overcome many of these shortcomings. To begin with, the main focus is on Niẓāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn*, with other texts being used to elucidate the views expressed in this romance: often when a certain view is placed in perspective, it becomes tangible and can be better understood. The mystico-ethical books are also used to buttress the ideas expressed in Niẓāmī's romance, and to show the close relation between theories on love and narratives of love. The second chapter considers Niẓāmī's style and the formal aspects of the romance. Chapter three begins with a study of the characters in *‘Udhrite* romances; an examination of these particular characters is helpful in interpreting the type of love Niẓāmī describes. The remaining sections of this chapter describe Majnūn's reception before and immediately after Niẓāmī's romance had been written. Chapters four to ten investigate Majnūn's essential attributes, such as his emaciated appearance, asceticism, kingship, love-death, love-madness, his ill-fate and his poetical ability. A profound analysis of each of these traits is fundamental to fathom how Niẓāmī portrays a lover such as

¹⁶ J. Zamānzāda, *Rawān-kāwī-yi suwar-i ‘ishq*, Bethesda: Iranbooks, 1994. I have taken over the English title mentioned on the cover of the book. The book is in Persian.

¹⁷ N. Pūrjawādī, "Risāla'ī dar bāra-yi 'ishq," p. 110.

Majnūn. Chapters eleven to thirteen outline Majnūn's relationships with other characters. These relationships are important if we are to understand Majnūn's actions and behaviour. For instance, in his relationship with his parents, Majnūn reveals his motives for fleeing from the community of men, while in his relationship with the chivalrous chieftain Naufal, Majnūn exhibits his chivalry. Chapter fourteen focuses on the ingenious way Niẓāmī depicts time and setting. These narrative elements are essential for the interpretation of the characters' unspoken feelings, and of the meditative and mystical tone of the romance. In sum, we will seek to probe the essential issues in Niẓāmī's romance, without overanalysing or imposing a certain interpretation on the text.

2. *Medieval Persian views on love*

In medieval Islamic society, love served diverse purposes for different disciplines. For philosophers it served as a means to attain to perfect happiness. By intellectualising love, philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna; 370–428/980–1037) considered love as a force flowing in every existing entity, in the planets and stars, in heaven and earth, in the mineral, the vegetable and the animal kingdoms. In his famous *Risāla fī 'l-ʿishq*, Ibn Sīnā considers love as an urge to obtain the good and to shun the evil. Every natural being is in love with an object or being in order to accomplish pure excellence. Love belongs to the divine essence.¹⁸ Love generates a desire in the person, who practises love to obtain the desired object or being. Even a particle of dust dances in the air as soon as it sees its beloved: the sun. Medieval Islamic philosophers relied extensively on Greek ideas on love. The theory of the affinity of souls is that souls are created in spherical form and are separated into two halves, each of which is put into a body. When they meet one another, love is aroused because of their original affinity. Moreover, Plato's idea that love

¹⁸ For the view of Ibn Sīnā on love see J.N. Bell, "Avicenna's Treatise on Love and the Nonphilosophical Muslim Tradition" in *Der Islam*, Band 63, Heft 1, 1986, pp. 73–89; for an English translation of this treatise see Fackenheim, "A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina" in *Mediaeval Studies*, 7, 1945, pp. 208–28. For the influence of this treatise on the theme of courtly love see G.E. Von Grūnebaum, "Avicenna's *Risāla fī 'l-ʿishq* and Courtly Love" in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4, October, 1952, pp. 233–38; A. Midī, *'Ishq dar adab-i Fārsī*, p. 35.

was a divine mania to be neither praised nor blamed has been extensively employed.¹⁹

According to astrologers, love could be kindled between two persons based on their dates of birth and the position of the planets. The course of a love relationship also depended on the planets. Saturn, Venus, Moon and Mercury were usually seen as instigators of love, while others were regarded as inauspicious.²⁰ Unlike Arabic sources such as the *Rasā'il* by the 'Brethren of Purity,' *Ikhwān aṣ-ṣafā'* and *Murūj adh-dhahab* by al-Mas'ūdī (d. 957) and *'Atf al-alif* by Abū 'l-Ḥasan ad-Daylamī, in which the authors devote short passages to the astrologers' view concerning the origin of love, Persian love treatises do not specifically deal with astrology.²¹ However, since the planets play a major role in determining the course of love, Persian romances do elaborate on the planets and their impacts on the lovers. Poets such as Firdausī (329–410 or 416/940–1019 or 1025), Fakhr ad-Dīn Gurgānī (d. ca. 448/1039), Nizāmī and others include astrological passages in their epics, showing the influence of the stars on the fate and love-life of the protagonists, while others, such as 'Aṣṣār of Tabrīz (d. 779/1377) and Jamālī of Delhi (862–971/1483–1536), preferred to make the heavenly bodies the protagonists in their allegorical romances, *Mihr u Mushtarī* (*The Sun and Jupiter*), and *Mihr u Māh* (*The Sun and the Moon*) respectively.²²

¹⁹ A wide range of ideas found in Islamic texts derive from the Greek and Jewish traditions. J.N. Bell gives a list of Greek and Jewish ideas on love in *Love Theory*, pp. 4–5. See also R. Walzer, "Aristotle, Galen, and Palladius on Love" in *Greek into Arabic: Essays on Islamic Philosophy*, Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1962, pp. 48–59. L.A. Giffen, *Theory of Profane love*, pp. 64–66; W. Raven, *Ibn Dāwūd*, chapter 2, pp. 58–61.

²⁰ S.H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Albany: State University of New York Press, reprint, 1993.

²¹ Rūzbihān Baqlī's treatment of this theme in *'Abhar al-'āshiqīn* is an imitation of al-Daylamī's book. See Rūzbihān Baqlī, *'Abhar al-'āshiqīn*, ed. H. Corbin & M. Mu'in, Tehran: Manūchihrī, 1366, pp. 89–90; Abū 'l-Ḥasan ad-Daylamī, *Kutāb 'atf al-alif*, ed. J.C. Vadet, Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1962, pp. 28–9. For the impact of ad-Daylamī's book on Rūzbihān's *'Abhar* see M. Takeshita, "Continuity and Change in the Tradition of Shīrāzī Love Mysticism" in *Orient*, 23, 1987, pp. 113–31. For an analysis of al-Mas'ūdī's treatment of love see J. Scott Meisami, "Mas'ūdī on Love and the Fall of the Barmakids" in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1989, pp. 252–77.

²² For an analysis of this romance see the introduction to Jamālī of Delhi's *Mathnawī-yi mihr u māh*, ed. Sayyid Ḥusām ad-Dīn Rāshidī, Rawalpindi: Persian Scientific Centre of Iran and Pakistan, 1974. For *Mihr u Mushtarī* see Dh.A. Ṣafā in *Elr*, under 'Aṣṣār Tabrīzī.

For medieval physicians, passionate love was a deadly disease that confused the natural balance of both the body and the soul. Symptoms of this illness were detailed in medical treatises. Ibn Sīnā includes the following characteristics as indications of love-sickness: hollowness of the eye, continuous movement of the eyelids, dryness and emaciation of the body, tearful eyes, the yellow colour of the skin, disordered behaviour, frequent deep sighs and an irregular pulse. On hearing love poetry and remembering the beloved, the lover's "condition changes from exhilaration and laughter to sadness and weeping."²³ To treat such an illness, various therapeutic suggestions were offered by physicians. The most famous of these, which also occurs in love poetry, belongs to Ibn Sīnā. He suggested a diagnosis by feeling the patient's pulse, which would then result in the deduction of the beloved's name; often the union then followed.²⁴ Other diagnoses for the illness include: the restoration of the patient's temperament by nutriment and medication; diversion of the lover's thoughts from the beloved by encouraging him to work, play and hunt; purchasing new slave girls and having intercourse with them; consulting old women and asking them to narrate the negative qualities of the beloved.²⁵ The most effective remedy remained union with the beloved.

Love was also an ethical concept, and was dealt with endlessly in ethical treatises and in the 'mirror for princes' genre. Many ethical treatises devoted a whole chapter to love, making them a rich source for some aspects of medieval Persian views on this concept. These books focus on the impact of love, and how one should deal with it. In the *Qābūs-nāma*, the most influential of the mirrors for princes,

²³ See M.W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, ed. D.E. Immish, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. Appendix three contains a translation of Ibn Sīnā's treatise on lovesickness. See also J. Scott Meisami "Mas'ūdī on Love," pp. 254, 274-75.

²⁴ Pulse-diagnosis occurs in Persian literature. See Nizāmī 'Arūḍī, *Chāhār-maqāla*, ed. M. Qazwīnī, re-ed. M. Mu'īn, Tehran: Dībā, 1375, pp. 121-22; M. 'Aufī, *Jawāmi' al-hikāyāt*, ed. M. Ramaḍānī, Tehran: Khāwar, no date, pp. 307-8; Maulānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī's *Mathnawī*, ed. M. Istī'lāmī, Tehran: Zawwār, 1372, Vol. 1, p. 16; see also B.Z. Furūzānfār, *Sharḥ-i mathnawī-yi sharīf*, Tehran: Zawwār, 1373, Vol. 1, pp. 46-7.

²⁵ See Irmeli Perho, *The Prophet's Medicine*, Helsinki, Studia Orientalia, 1995, pp. 134-35. For the employment of old women for such practices see Leyla Rouhi, *Mediation and Love*, pp. 143-46; the fourth/ninth-century physician Maysarī also states that sexual intercourse lessens the lover's love. See Ḥakīm Maysarī, *Dānish-nāma dar 'ilm-i pizishkī*, ed. B. Zanjānī, Tehran: 1366, p. 149, l. 2412.

the Ziyārid prince 'Unṣur al-Ma'ālī Kay Kāwūs b. Iskandar (412–92/1021–98) devotes chapter 14 to "The Practice of Love." Kay Kāwūs' analysis of love is practical. He tells his son how to love, how a man falls in love and how love operates in him. He also refers to the endless suffering of separation and the fleeting pleasure of union. One should try not to fall in love, because being in love is coupled with suffering, particularly when the lover is poor, and this is, as Kay Kāwūs states, definitely not the way wise men live their lives. According to the author, "one year of the joy of union is not worth one hour of the pain of separation, because to be in love is suffering, pain of the heart and affliction from beginning to end. Although it is a pleasing pain, it is a torment if you are in separation. And if you are in the state of union and the beloved knows your heart, you have no real pleasure due to the beloved's feigned disdain and cold manner."²⁶

Kay Kāwūs' opinion on love and being in love is not entirely positive. He believes that no one falls in love unless he has a fine nature. This is also the reason why young people fall in love more frequently than older people.²⁷ Kay Kāwūs advises his reader that, if he falls in love with someone at first sight, he should immediately think rationally and control the heart and avoid focusing on the person with whom he has fallen in love. He should occupy himself with something, and direct his passion somewhere else. Kay Kāwūs believes that if the lover does not see the beloved, it does not take more than a week until he is released from the affliction.²⁸ Nevertheless, at the end, Kay Kāwūs permits his son to fall in love because it is understandable that a youth may be smitten by love. He warns him, however, not to fall in love when he has reached old age because he would then be the target of popular censure. This opinion of love and old age occurs frequently in other texts. For instance, in Fakhr ad-Dīn Asad Gurgānī's *Wīs and Rāmīn*, when the aged Maubad falls in love with the young Wīs, he reproaches himself several times for having fallen in love. At the end of his chapter, Kay Kāwūs writes: "O son, all these things I have recounted. I know that when

²⁶ 'Unṣur al-Ma'ālī Kay Kāwūs, *Qābūs-nāma*, ed. G. Yūsufī, Tehran: 'Ilmī wa Farhangī, 1371, p. 81.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 80.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 82.

you fall in love, you will not follow my words. I myself, at this old age, have composed a poem on the state of love:

Every man who is living and speaking
Must be like 'Adhrā' and Wāmiq.²⁹
Anyone who is not like them is a hypocrite:
He is not a pious man who is not a lover.

Kay Kāwūs adds: "Despite what I have said in the above poem, do not follow it, and try not to fall in love."³⁰ In the last section of his chapter, Kay Kāwūs enumerates the necessary character traits of the beloved and advises his son how to treat the beloved in public. The author tells his son to choose someone who is worthy of friendship and love. The beloved should not necessarily be a Plato or a Ptolemy, but she must have some brains. The beloved does not need to be the paradigm of beauty, but she must possess some sweetness and taste. These are necessary to shut the mouth of people, because people never cease finding a flaw in others. Moreover, Kay Kāwūs advises his son not to take the beloved to festivities. If he does so, he should not occupy himself with the beloved in the presence of others because people may not consider the beloved to be as beautiful as he thinks she is: the beloved may be charming only in the eyes of the lover. Finally, he should not whisper in her ear, should not summon her at every moment or feed her with fruits continuously.³¹

In addition to the above texts on love, the majority of the love treatises possess a religious character, and the theologians had their own views on love. Theologians looked at 'passionate love' (*ishq*) from two different vantage points. Although they regarded love as an ennobling power that could lead man to ideal spiritual refinement, it was also the source of 'concupiscence' (*hawā'*) and, when it reached an obsessive stage, of love-madness. Many orthodox theologians censured the use of passionate love to represent man's relationship with the divine. Love involved issues such as the concept of martyrs of love, the permissibility of looking on certain persons, sexual relationships, etc., which the theologians deemed to be harmful to religion.

²⁹ A pair of lovers usually quoted as ideal lovers. For more information see B. Utas, "Did 'Adhra' Remain Virgin?" in *Orientalia Suecana*, 33-35, 1984-86, pp. 429-41; idem, "The Ardent Lover and the Virgin" in *Acta Orientalia*, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1995, pp. 229-39.

³⁰ *Qābūs-nāma*, pp. 84-5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Some theologians interpreted love directed towards the Divine as obedience and nothing else.³²

As can be inferred from the brief introduction above, there are a wide range of definitions of love in numerous medieval Islamic books. Apart from the definitions and descriptions of the workings of love, in the broadest sense of the word, to be found in philosophical, medical, ethical and theological writings, there are many Persian treatises on mystical love. For mystics, love is the supreme principle, an absolute necessity upon which all other possible existing entities are based. R.A. Nicholson summarises this mystical concept of love as follows: "The love thus symbolised is the emotional element in religion, the rapture of the seer, the courage of the martyr, the faith of the saint, the only basis of moral perfection and spiritual knowledge. Practically, it is self-renunciation and self-sacrifice, the giving up of all possessions—wealth, honour, will, life, and whatever else men value—for the Beloved's sake without any thought of reward."³³ Since love is the axis of the universe and is identical with the Truth (*Haqq*), mystics such as Fakhr ad-Dīn 'Irāqī (d. 688/1289) sometimes changed the formulation of the profession of faith: 'There is no God save God' into 'There is no love save Love.'³⁴ In some cases, love takes an even higher position than religion. Farīd ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār tells an anecdote about a pagan lover who is killed by the Second Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb when the man resists being converted to Islam. As soon as the Prophet hears about this matter, he regretfully asks 'Umar how he could possibly kill a lover!³⁵ In another story told in *Kamāl-nāma* by Khājū Kirmānī (d. 742/1341–2) love is given a higher position than religion. When an infidel lover is ordered by his beloved to bring her the head of the Fourth Caliph 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 41/661), he fights 'Alī, but when the victorious Caliph finds out that the man is a desperate lover and that he can only attain union with his beloved by cutting off 'Alī's head, he offers himself to the lover so that the man can attain union.³⁶

³² Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 57.

³³ R.A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, p. 107.

³⁴ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 137.

³⁵ Farīd ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. H. Ritter, reprinted in Tehran: Khāja, 1368, p. 223, ll. 1–14.

³⁶ See Khājū Kirmānī, *Kamāl-nāma* in *Khamṣa*, ed. S. Niyāz Kirmānī, Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Shāhid Bāhunar, 1370, pp. 132–33, ll. 580–618.

Love is treated in a number of places of the Koran. The words used for love and its synonyms in the Holy Book are *ḥubb*, and *wudd* and derivatives from these roots such as *maḥabba* and *mawadda*. The word *mawadda* is used to denote friendship and affection while the other three refer to both human love and transcendental love. God himself is referred to by the epithet of 'loving' (*wadūd*) (11:90; 85:14). In 20:39, addressing Moses, He says: "I lavish My love on you." In another verse (2:165) speaking to pious believers, it is stated: "(...) the love of God is stronger in the faithful." One of the most favoured verses (5:54) occurring regularly in treatises on love, and proclaiming the reciprocal love between man and the divine runs as follows: "He loves them and they love Him." In another verse (3:29), man is promised: "God will love you and forgive you your sins."

The early mystics usually used the Koranic words such as *maḥabba* and *wudd* to denote love, but later they preferred 'passionate love' (*ʿishq*), a non-Koranic term to depict their relationship with the divine. Scholars differ as to which mystic was the first to systematically use the term *ʿishq* rather than *maḥabba*. While A. Schimmel conjectures that Abū 'l-Ḥusayn Nūrī (226–295/840–907) introduced the use of the word *ʿishq*, C.W. Ernst thinks that 'Abd al-Wāḥid Ibn Zayd, in the seventh century, was the first Sufi to use the term to expound the relationship between man and God.³⁷ M. Arkoun argues that the substitution of *ʿishq* for *maḥabba* was due to the Persian mystic Ḥusayn Mansūr Ḥallāj (d. 309/922).³⁸ Schimmel explains that "for Nūrī the term *maḥabba* denoted a higher stage than *ʿishq*, for the *ʿāshiq*, he thought, is kept away, while Love (*maḥabba*) is to rend the veils and unveil the secrets."³⁹ Defining *ʿishq*, Arkoun states that it is "the irresistible desire (*shauq*, *tashawwuq*) to obtain possession of a loved object or being (*maʿshūq*). It betrays, therefore, in one who experiences it (the *ʿāshiq*) a deficiency, a want, which he must supply at any cost in order to reach perfection (*kamāl*)."⁴⁰ Generally speaking, until the second half of the ninth century, prominent mystics such as Abū

³⁷ A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 137; C.W. Ernst, "The Stages of Love in Early Persian Sufism" in *Classical Persian Sufism: from its Origins to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London: KNP, 1993, p. 438.

³⁸ M. Arkoun in *EI*, under 'Ishk.

³⁹ For more information on Nūrī's view on love see A. Schimmel, "Abū 'l-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī 'Qibla of the Lights'" in *Classical Persian Sufism: from its Origins to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London: KNP, 1993, pp. 59–64; the above citation occurs on p. 62.

⁴⁰ M. Arkoun, in *EI*, under 'Ishk.

Bakr Kalābādī (d. ca. 380/990), Abū Naṣr Sarrāj (d. 378/988), Abū 'l-Qāsim Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) and Hujwīrī (d. ca. 465/1072) usually refrained from employing the term *'ishq*, preferring to speak of *maḥabba*.⁴¹

The extensive use of the word *'ishq* in the twelfth century in Khurāsān is a fundamental issue in the history of classical Persian literature, particularly of Persian mystical love poetry.⁴² In Aḥmad Ghazālī's time, the term *'ishq* still carried a strong erotic connotation. Mystics preferred the profane, erotic vocabulary and, in their writings on love, tried to justify the use of such terminology. Aḥmad-i Jām Nāmiqī (also known as Zhanda Pīl, d. 536/1141), for example, argues in his works in favour of the term *'ishq* rather than the Koranic concept of *maḥabba*, by stating that although the term does not occur in the Koran, there are numerous traditions in favour of *'ishq*. He cites, for example, "My servant does not stop approaching me till he becomes my lover and I his lover."⁴³

Ghazālī's contemporary Ibn 'Abbādī devotes two separate chapters in his *Ṣūfī-nāma*, one to *maḥabba* and one to *'ishq*.⁴⁴ This book is an important source for the shift in the use of these terms. In his chapter on *maḥabba*, the author emphasises that the term *'ishq* cannot be used to describe man's love towards God, yet in his chapter on *'ishq*, he openly speaks of a mystical love. Ibn 'Abbādī distinguishes five stages: "When some trouble appears in the heart for an absentee, this is called longing (*shauq*); when an understanding with someone is established, it is called love (*mawadda*); when the person chooses someone as a friend, it is called friendship (*khulla*); when the friendship becomes free from any calamity, and honesty is employed to attain the friend's contentment, it is called love (*maḥabba*); when the person is melted in the melting-pot of *maḥabba* and he turns his face towards annihilation, it is called passionate love (*'ishq*)."⁴⁵ The

⁴¹ See N. Pūrjawādī, *Ru'yat-i māh dar āsmān*, Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Dānishgāhī, pp. 153-5; for the use of various terms for love see Pūrjawādī's series of articles in *Nashr-i Dānish* that appeared under the title "Bāda-yi 'ishq 1-5" Vol. 11, No. 6, 1370, pp. 4-13; Vol. 12, No. 1, 1370, pp. 4-18; Vol. 12, No. 2, 1370, pp. 6-15; Vol. 12, No. 3, 1371, pp. 26-32; Vol. 12, No. 4, 1371, pp. 22-30.

⁴² See N. Pūrjawādī, "Risāla'ī dar bāra-yi 'ishq," pp. 105-111.

⁴³ Aḥmad-i Jām Nāmiqī, *Uns at-tā'ibin*, ed. 'A. Fāḍil, Tehran: Tūs, 1368, p. 210.

⁴⁴ See *Kitāb taṣfiya fī aḥwāl al-mutaṣawwifa* (*Ṣūfī-nāma*), ed. Gh. Yūsufī, Tehran: 'Ilmī, 1368, pp. 170-73; 208-09.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-71, l. 18, 1-4.

author concludes that each of these stages belongs to a class of people including prophets, saints and believers. Any kind of love towards created beings is illusory (*majāz*) and can generate calamities and corruption. In Ibn 'Abbādī's view, "Longing is for the novice; friendship is for he who is in the middle [of the mystical path]; love (*maḥabba*) is for he who has reached the end. And if someone reaches the perfection of passionate love (*ishq*) he sees that the reality of love cannot be expressed by words."⁴⁶ From the twelfth century onwards, Persian mystics speak of *ishq* as the highest form of love.

One of the reasons for the penetration of the erotic idiom into the mystical writing is the increasing use of poetry by mystics from the twelfth century onwards. The use of words from the erotic earthly sphere was not confined to the term *ishq*: the entire repertory of profane love poetry was employed by mystics to express their ardent love for the immaterial Beloved. The inclusion of the mystical and profane love vocabulary gave the Persian language a highly metonymic character. The terminology borrowed from profane love poetry can be classified in three categories: firstly, terms describing the beloved 'from head to toe' (*az sar tā pā*) such as lock, eye, eyebrow, eyelashes, cheek, beauty spot, dimple, the stature like a cypress, saliva, lips, teeth, down, etc.; secondly, terms associated with wine-drinking such as tavern, wine, wine-jar, dregs, cup-bearer, beaker, tavern-haunter, etc.; and thirdly, terms involving weaponry such as soldiers, nightly attacks, swords, daggers, arrows, wounds, etc. Aḥmad Ghazālī systematically used profane erotic vocabulary throughout the *Sawānīh*. The use of these terms in the transcendental sense of love is noteworthy and has had a lasting impact on Persian mystical love poetry. It also provoked severe censure from certain theologians such as Ibn al-Jauzī (510–597/1126–1200), who criticises Ghazālī in his several of his works.⁴⁷ With the increase of the profane erotic vocabulary, mystics of later centuries desired an accurate definition of certain words as well. They implored their spiritual masters (*pīrs*) to expound on the underlying meanings of, for instance, the beloved's cheeks, lips, hands, etc. Maḥmūd Shabistarī's (d. 720/1320) *Gulshan-i rāz*

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 173, ll. 3–5.

⁴⁷ See J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry: The Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Ḥakīm Sanā'ī of Ghazna*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983, pp. 164–65. H. Ritter, *Das Meer*, p. 473; D.S. Margoliouth, "The Devil's Delusion of Ibn Jauzī" in *Islamic Culture*, 9–12, 1935–38.

consists largely of questions and answers about some of the terms mentioned above.⁴⁸

Sufism developed its own version of the creation myth, which is entirely based on Love and on the Beloved's ardent desire to be loved by His lover: mankind. Many mystics including Nizāmī believe that "before the creation of love, there was initially no rumour of existence in the world of Non-existence."⁴⁹ Relying on the Koranic verse (5:54) "He loves them and they love Him" and quoting great Sufis such as Bāyazīd of Bisṭām (d. 260/874), mystics underscore that God was first the lover and man the beloved.⁵⁰ With a reference to the above Koranic verse, Najm ad-Dīn Dāya (d. 618/1221) states that "the thread of this alluring discourse was unwound" by the following *ḥadīth qudsī*: "I was a Hidden Treasure and I desired to be known, so I created the creation in order that I might be known."⁵¹ Being in His infinitely rich solitude, God desired to reveal Himself so that man can have knowledge of His essence and attributes.⁵² God created man in His image, in the fairest of forms (95:5); he is regarded as a mirror displaying God's 'names and attributes' (*asmā' wa ṣifāt*). Man is a microcosmic replica of the creator and his creation. In a famous tradition, God speaks: "I created you to see My vision in the mirror of your spirit, and My love in your heart."⁵³ In another frequently cited tradition, it is stated: "Whoever knows himself, knows his Lord." Based on several traditions and Koranic verses (38:72, 75), mystics believe that before breathing His own breath into man, God kneaded man's clay with his own hands for forty

⁴⁸ For the codification of the mystical terminology see J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Poems*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997, chapter on 'Poetry of Love,' pp. 51–83; also see N. Pūrjawādī, "Mas'ala-yi ta'rīf-i alfāz-i ramzī dar shī'r-i 'āshiqāna-yi Fārsī" in *Ma'ārif*, Vol. 8, No. 3, March 1992, pp. 3–40.

⁴⁹ *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 69, l. 16.

⁵⁰ Najm ad-Dīn Dāya cites Kharaqānī (d. 450/1034) in *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, ed. M.A. Riyāhī, Tehran: 'Ilmī wa Farhangī, 1992, p. 49; English translation by H. Algar, *The Path of God's Bondsmen from Origin to Return*, New York: 1982, p. 74; all further English references are to this book. Aḥmad Ghazālī quotes Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī in *Sawānīh, Aphorismen über die Liebe*, herausgegeben von H. Ritter, Istanbul: 1942, p. 41, *faṣl* 21 (4), ll. 18–20; cf. Rūzbihān Baqlī, *Sharḥ-i shatḥiyyāt*, ed. H. Corbin, Tehran: Tahūrī, 1374, p. 60, l. 22.

⁵¹ Najm ad-Dīn Dāya, *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, p. 49, English trans., p. 75.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 2, English trans., p. 26.

⁵³ A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 295.

days while constantly adding 'dew of love' (*shabnam-i 'ishq*) to man's substance, thereby making man's heart.⁵⁴

As the primary principle of existence, love came into existence out of nothingness for the sake of two beings: God and mankind. As expressed in the Koran, God is very close to man, He knows the prompting of his soul and is closer to him than his jugular vein (50:16). Not only did God teach man the Names (2:31), but He also planted His Signs in him (41:37, 53; 51:20). God appointed man as his special vice-regent (*khalīfa*) on earth and consigned his 'Trust' (*amāna*) (33:72), the burden of which the heaven, the earth and the mountains refused to carry. Although the Trust is interpreted diversely as responsibility, free will, longing, pain, etc., mystics usually conceive of it as love. It is this very love that makes man superior to angels who lack love. Emphasising man's superior position, Najm ad-Dīn Dāya states that the name of man (*insān*) is etymologically derived from intimacy (*uns*), which he received from the divine Presence at the beginning.⁵⁵ Aḥmad Ghazālī believes that love actually came into existence for the sake of man: man is intermingled with love like the scent and the aloe-wood.⁵⁶

Mystics presume that the love relationship between man and his creator started in pre-eternity (*azal*) and was a love at first sight. It was God who initiated the loving relationship by revealing His luminous countenance and by speaking to the loins of Adam on the day of *alast*, 'Am I not your Lord?', to which the progeny of Adam answered: "Yes, we witness that you are" (7:172).⁵⁷ Mystics take this verse as the 'Covenant' (*mīthāq*) made between man and God. This covenant is reiterated by several other verses in the Koran and numerous traditions. Man proved to be unworthy of such a pure and perfect love. By committing sin, he has fallen to the "lowest of the low" (95:5), the only way of regaining his primordial position is to start

⁵⁴ See Jamāl Khalīl Shirwānī, *Nuzhat al-majālīs*, ed. M.A. Riyāhī, Tehran: Mahārat, first edition 1366, p. 212, second edition 1375, p. 253, quatrain 790; *Sukhanān-i manzūm-i Abū Sa'īd Abū 'l-Khayr*, ed. S. Nafīsī, Tehran: Haydarī, 1334, p. 31, q. 211; Dāya's *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, p. 72, English trans., p. 100, also see notes on pp. 581, 697 in the Persian text. For the place of man in Islam see A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, chapter 4, pp. 187-227.

⁵⁵ Dāya, *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, p. 103, English trans., p. 125.

⁵⁶ *Sawānīh*, p. 4, *faṣl* 1, l. 6.

⁵⁷ For an elaborate discussion on this verse see N. Pūrjawādī, "Ahd-i alast: 'aqīda-yi Abū Hāmid Ghazālī wa jāyghā-i tārikhī-yi ān" in *Ma'ārif*, Vol. 7, No. 2, November 1990, pp. 3-48.

a journey climbing the ladder of love.⁵⁸ Mystics also believe that the reason why man proved to be unable to answer God's love was his inexperience. In this connection, earthly love is usually conceived as a substitute that teaches man the twists and turns, preparing him to practise transcendental love. It is regarded as an essential preparatory phase for a more elevated love.

Another topic linked with the creation myth is the love relationship between Iblīs and God. Prior to Adam's creation, the Throne was the direction towards which angels turned their faces in worship, but as soon as Adam was created, they had to turn towards him. Seeing Adam as a potential 'rival' (*raqīb*) for his Beloved, Iblīs refused to prostrate before him and God burned him with the brandmark of separation and the eternal curse.⁵⁹ In numerous mystical treatises, mystics elaborate on various qualities of Iblīs' love for God and his relationship with mankind. On the one hand, Iblīs is regarded as an archetypal lover, who can be seen as a model for the mystical path; on the other hand, he is a 'pretender' (*mudda'ī*).⁶⁰ Iblīs advocated a strict monotheism by arguing with God and refusing to prostrate before any reality other than God.⁶¹ Poets such as Muṣliḥ ad-Dīn Sa'dī (d. ca. 695/1296) and Ḥāfiẓ (d. 791/1389) refer to Iblīs as a 'worshipper of himself' (*khud-parast*), 'excluded from the inner circle' (*nā-maḥram*), and 'one who stirs up mischief' (*nizā'-jū*). In one of his most famous lines, Ḥāfiẓ points to the special relation between man and God from the beginning of the creation, taking Iblīs as an outsider: "The pretender wanted to come to see the spectacle of the secret, (but) an invisible hand appeared and struck at the chest of the one who was not intimate."⁶²

⁵⁸ Sa'd ad-Dīn Hātifi takes the entire existence as a treasure, the ladder of which is love, see *Nuzhat al-majālīs*, (1366) p. 206, (1375) p. 246, q. 747.

⁵⁹ Nagaurī, *Lawā'ih*, pp. 4, 128. This book has been erroneously published under 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī's name. For bibliographical information see 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī, *Lawā'ih*, ed. R. Farmanish, Tehran: Manūchihrī, no date.

⁶⁰ *Diwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, ed. P. Nātil Khānlārī, Tehran: Khārazmī, 1362, p. 312, gh. 148, l. 4. Ḥāfiẓ makes numerous allusions to this aspect of Satan in his *Diwān*, see M. Šiddiqiyyān & A. Mīr 'Abidīnī, *Farhang-i wāzha-namā-yi Ḥāfiẓ*, Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1366, under *Mudda'ī*.

⁶¹ P.J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983, p. 169; see also Sadik al-Azm, *Kritiek op godsdienst en wetenschap: vijf essays over islamitische cultuur*, red. R. Kon, Amsterdam: El Hizra, 1996, pp. 49–85; N. Pūrjawādī, *Sullān-i ṭarīqat*, Tehran: Āgāh, 1358, pp. 45–9; A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 193–99.

⁶² Also compare Muḥammad Zangī, *Munāzara-yi chashm wa dil*, in *Zangī-nāma*, ed. I. Afshār, Tehran: Khāja, 1372, p. 110; Iblīs is repeatedly criticised in 'Aṭṭār's

Persian romantic poets such as Nizāmī integrated various views of love in their romances. According to Nizāmī, the entire universe, from the measureless planets to a tiny atom, everything is in one way or another in love and represents some aspects of love. In the preface to *Khusrau and Shirin*, Nizāmī offers a cohesive picture of love's all empowering character.⁶³ In his view, heavenly spheres turn towards love in their prayer, and without love the world is worthless. The best occupation for a wise man is to be a slave of love. The only serious matter in the world is to practise love, and the rest is no more than a game. Nizāmī regards love as the soul of the world, keeping things alive. In line with the Sufis and philosophers, Nizāmī depicts love as 'attraction' (*kishish*), 'longing' (*shauq*) or 'inclination' (*mayl*).⁶⁴ Love is the reason for the creation, and every created entity inherently possesses some kind of love. The attracting power of a magnet derives from its love and longing for other stones and irons.⁶⁵ Nizāmī rhetorically states that if the magnet was not in love, how could it steal an iron with such a longing. Another issue Nizāmī refers to is that every entity has an inclination to attain its own centre, and this inclination is named love. Some entities have a natural inclination to go upwards and others downwards. In the case of a volcano, Nizāmī states: "When fire can find no opening in the earth, it splits the earth and hurries upwards." In contrast, when water, in the form of a cloud, tarries in the air for some time, it finally turns downwards because its nature inclines towards this. Nizāmī believes that love is an attractive force holding the heaven and the earth together. The author goes on to say that the 'temperaments' (*ṭabā'ir*) have no occupation other than attraction, which is called love by philosophers. Taking love as attraction, Nizāmī surmises that the entire creation subsists by love. It is by this attraction that the opposite poles are drawn towards each other. Hence

works. See, for instance, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, ed. Sayyid Ṣādiq Gauharīn, Tehran: Shirkat Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī wa Farhangī, 1368, pp. 161–62; see also P.J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy*, pp. 45–9.

⁶³ B. Tharwatiyān, pp. 115–17, ll. 52–77.

⁶⁴ Following Nizāmī's path, other romantic poets devote a chapter on love at the beginning of their romances. In his chapter on the quality of love, by using the rhetorical figure of, 'poetic obligation' (*iltizām*), Wahshī Bāfiqī elaborates on 'inclination' (*mayl*). See *Farhād and Shirin* in *Dīwān*, ed. P. Bābā'ī, Tehran: Nigāh, 1373, p. 425.

⁶⁵ Cf. Gurgānī, *Wīs u Rāmīn*, ed. M.J. Maḥjūb, Tehran: Ibn Sīnā, 1337, p. 110, l. 241.

Nizāmī says: "If the heaven were free from love, how could the earth possibly thrive?"

Moreover, Nizāmī emphasises that, since love transcends race and religion and speaks in every language, its treasury can be found both in the Ka'ba, in a monastery and in a tavern. So wondrous is its power, if it falls into the 'chest' of a stone, it will be transformed into a jewel. Nizāmī also sees love as a safe home, in which man feels secure and in which the seed of love will germinate and grow. Love is the king of the soul and, therefore, has an overall power over man. These are some of the reasons why Nizāmī advises man to tread the path of love.

According to Nizāmī, people who are not in love are *fisurda*, 'frozen,' 'depressed,' or idiomatically, their hearts are dead. The figure of the *fisurda* appears as early as Ḥakīm Sanā'ī's (d. 525/1131) time, and later became something of a *dramatis persona* in Persian love poetry. *Fisurda* is usually placed in sharp contrast to a fervent lover who gambles everything (*āshiq-i pāk-bāz*). For instance, in Sanā'ī's *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa*, a *fisurda* sees a lover who laughs good-humouredly when he learns that he is to be beheaded by the beloved. The frozen man is surprised and asks the reason for the lover's happy laughter. The latter then justifies his action by giving a definition of love and the lover.⁶⁶ It is often stressed that even if the *fisurda* were to possess a hundred souls, he remains dead without love. In Nizāmī's opinion, man should not be satisfied and happy with eating and sleeping, because he then resembles a donkey more than a human being. The poet states that it is better to love a cat than to be alone, even if you are as powerful as a lion.⁶⁷ For Nizāmī, everything depends on love. He expresses this view throughout his writings. For instance, in *Laylī and Majnūn*, when the poet characterises the love of the lovers, he states:

This love is not a sign of nothing,
this rare thing is the wonder of the world.
Every poor man in his house,
lives with his mate by the claims of love.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ See *infra*, chapter 7:1, p. 132; also see J.T.P. de Bruijn, "Stories of Sanā'ī's Faxri-nāme" in *Pand-o Sokhan*, eds. C. Balay *et al.*, Téhéran, 1995, p. 88.

⁶⁷ *Khusrau u Shirin*, ed. B. Tharwāṭiān, p. 115, l. 62.

⁶⁸ *Laylī u Majnūn*, ed. A.A. Alizada, Moscow: Dānish, 1965, p. 489, ll. 79–80. All further quotations are from this edition.

In another place, referring to the romance itself, Nizāmī states: "If its reader is frozen, he will become a lover, if he is not dead."⁶⁹ At another point, speaking of himself, the poet remarks: "When I cannot see my soul for lack of love, I sell my heart and purchase a soul." Like other Persian poets, Nizāmī always condemns the *fisurda*.⁷⁰ Aḥmad Ghazālī shares the same view when he observes: "Be not without love, so you will not die, die in love to remain alive."⁷¹

Generally speaking, Persian treatises and romances distinguish two types of love, mystical and profane love. To explain the difference between spiritual and earthly love, Aḥmad Ghazālī uses the metaphor of true and false pearls given by an able master to a novice to pierce.⁷² The master himself is afraid to touch the true pearl, let alone to pierce it, yet he puts this costly pearl among some other false pearls hoping that the novice will distinguish it. Piercing the false pearls enables the novice to gain sufficient skill and courage to pierce the precious pearl, supposing that he can first discern this pearl, of course.

The earthly or 'metaphorical' (*majāzī*) love can turn into a spiritual or 'real' (*ḥaqīqī*) love when a transcendental element is added to it.⁷³ For instance, in the romance of *Yūsuf and Zūlaykhā*, Zūlaykhā's profane love gradually grows into spiritual love when she starts to worship Yūsuf as a representation of the Beloved's epiphanic manifestation. The same applies to the story of *Laylī and Majnūn* in which the separated Majnūn idealises the beloved to such a degree that she acquires a transcendental attribute. The more unattainable the beloved is, the more the idealisation increases. Moreover, by suffering long periods of separation, the lover becomes more intimate with the idealised image of the beloved than with her actual physical being. It is for this reason that when Laylī offers herself to Majnūn

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 46, chapter 5, l. 66.

⁷⁰ *Khusrau u Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwatīyān, p. 115, l. 56.

⁷¹ *Nuzhat al-majālis*, (1366) p. 209, (1375) p. 250, quatrain 774; cf. Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, Vol. 5, p. 186, l. 3855.

⁷² *Sawānīh*, p. 5, *faṣl* 1 (4), ll. 17–19. Several mystics have commented on Ghazālī's metaphor. See, for instance, Nāgaurī, *Lau'ā'ih*, p. 9; idem, *Sharḥ-i Sawānīh* in *Shurūḥ-i Sawānīh*, ed. A. Mujāhid, Tehran: Surūsh, 1372, p. 36; Kāshānī, *Kunūz al-asrār*, in *Shurūḥ-i sawānīh*, ed. A. Mujāhid, Tehran: Surūsh, 1372, p. 8.

⁷³ See H. Ritter, "Philologika VII" in *Der Islam*, 21, 1933, pp. 89–90; idem, *Das Meer*, pp. 369–81; F. Meier, *Die Fawā'ih al-ḡamāl wa fawātiḥ al-ḡalāl des Naḡm ad-Dīn al-Kubrā. Eine Darstellung mystischer Erfahrungen im Islam aus der Zeit um 1200 nach Chr.*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1957, p. 220.

towards the end of the romance, he rejects her because he is actually searching for a transcendental version of Laylī. Emphasising Yūsuf's and Laylī's chastity and heavenly beauty, poets such as 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492) have interpreted these love stories in purely allegorical terms.⁷⁴ Based on the tradition *al-majāzu qanṭaratu 'l-ḥaqīqa*, 'illusion/metaphor is a bridge to reality,' earthly love is usually regarded as a bridge bringing man to the real love.⁷⁵ Metaphorical love has an educational value. Through this kind of love, the lover can learn how to practise love. Many writers on the theory of love such as Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 606/1209) actually advise the lover to practise earthly love first, in order to be able to cope with real love. Therefore, Rūzbihān discerns various stages of love in 'Abhar al-'āshiqīn.⁷⁶ As shown by Masataka Takeshita, Rūzbihān identifies fourteen stages of love, which are largely based on ad-Daylamī's 'Atf al-alif.⁷⁷ Rūzbihān exhibits love's growth and its transformation from one stage to another, until it reaches its zenith.

In theoretical treatises on love, the process of falling in love is usually described as the emission of fire from the eyes. The eye and love are like two flint-stones: as soon as they strike each other, often by the glance of the eye, a fire is kindled which goes through the eyes into the heart. This fire remains there, depending on love's intensity, until it has cleansed all compartments of the heart. In extreme love relationships such as Laylī and Majnūn, the fire boils the blood to such an extent that it even reaches the brain. Boiling the brain, the tears of blood run over through the lover's eyes. The Persian poets follow Plato's efflux theory of vision and elaborate upon

⁷⁴ For these allegorical stories see Jāmī, *Mathnawī-yi haft aurang*, ed. Mudarris-Gilānī, Tehran: Sa'dī, 1366. In Sufism, Yūsuf and Laylī are symbols of the heavenly Beloved *par excellence*. For a treatment of this subject in the writings of Rūmī see A. Schimmel, "Yūsuf in Mawlana Rūmī's Poetry" in *The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London: KNP, pp. 45-59. See also J. Sattārī, *Dard-i 'ishq-i Zūlaykhā: Pazūhishī dar qissa-yi Yūsuf*, Tehran: Tūs, 1373. For an analysis of Jāmī's poem, see A.E. Khairallah, *Love, Madness and Poetry: An Interpretation of the Majnun Legend*, Beirut: Beirut Texts und Studien, Bd. 25, 1980, pp. 106-25.

⁷⁵ Sanā'ī describes the created entities as arches on the bridge of Love's road. See *Hadiqa*, Ms. Bagdatli Vehbi, No 1672 (Istanbul), dated 522/1157, p. 136r, l. 5; cf. Rūzbihān, 'Abhar, p. 42, ll. 12-3 where he makes another distinction: "natural love ('ishq-i ṭabī'ī) is a bridge for spiritual love ('ishq-i rūḥānī) and the latter is a bridge for 'Godly love' ('ishq-i rabbānī)."

⁷⁶ For an analysis of Rūzbihān's classification see C.W. Ernst, "The Stages of Love in Early Persian Sufism" in *Classical Persian Sufism*, pp. 435-53.

⁷⁷ Masataka Takeshita, "Continuity and Change," pp. 113-31.

it. In this theory, as outlined by Donaldson-Evans, the eye functions not "as a mere receiver or reflector of light rays, but as possessing its own internal illumination in the form of fire. (. . .) The eye (. . .) is a transmitter of light, sending out beams which, when they strike another object, either carry the image back to the eye or actually join the eye to the object being viewed."⁷⁸ In the *Sawānīh*, there are some sporadic references to the eye. For instance, in the following quatrain, the author states that the sight is the source of falling in love:

The essence of falling in love starts with the eye:
as the eye beholds, infatuation flows.
By excessive desire many fowls may fall into a trap;
the moth falls into fire by the excessive desire for light.⁷⁹

Another theme dealt with in amatory texts is the nature of love. Love is described as affliction in the earliest specimens of New Persian sources. Shahīd of Balkh (d. 324/936) takes love as affliction (*balā*).⁸⁰ Among the Ghaznawīd poets, Farrukhī-yi Sīstānī (d. 428/1037) repeatedly defines love as affliction.⁸¹ The tenth century poetess Rābi'a Quzdārī experiences love as pain and asks God to make her beloved fall in love, so that he experiences the same pain.⁸²

Mystic poets such as 'Aṭṭār identify love as affliction, linking this notion to the primordial covenant between man and God. In his view, when God posed the question "Am I not your Lord?", man answered by *balā*.⁸³ The word *balā* signifies not only "yes" but also "affliction." An explanation for such a denomination for love is, as Sumnūn the Lover (d. 287/900) has said, "so that not every plebeian can claim love and desert this affliction at the first confrontation."⁸⁴ In his elegant rhyming prose, 'Abdullāh Anṣārī (d. 481/1089) states: "Love is not pain but it causes pain; is not an affliction but it brings affliction to brave men. Although it is the essence of peace

⁷⁸ L.K. Donaldson-Evans, *Love's Fatal Glance: A Study of the Eye Imagery in the Poets of the Ecole Lyonnaise*, Mississippi: Romance Monographs: 1980, pp. 12-3.

⁷⁹ *Sawānīh*, p. 40, *faṣl* 21 (1), ll. 6-7.

⁸⁰ *Ash'ār-i parākanda*, p. 23.

⁸¹ Farrukhī-yi Sīstānī, *Diwān*, ed. M. Dabīrsiyāqī, Tehran: Zawwār, 1371, q. 14, p. 25; q. 25, p. 43; q. 80, p. 165; p. 435.

⁸² A. Idārahī Gīlānī, *Shā'irān-i ham'aṣr-i Rūdakī*, Tehran: Adabī wa Tārīkhī, 1370, p. 93.

⁸³ *Muṣibat-nāma*, ed. Nūrānī Wiṣāl, Tehran: Zawwār, 1373, p. 133.

⁸⁴ 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, ed. H. Khalīlī, Tehran: Manūchihri, 1370, p. 446.

it is the essence of the plague."⁸⁵ After advising his reader to suffer affliction cheerfully like the prophet Job, Aḥmad Nakhjawānī considers affliction as the lover's food; to be in love cannot be imagined without affliction. The chivalrous men who welcome affliction have first drunk a goblet of contentment (*riḍā*). For them, exertion, rest, remedy and pain are identical.⁸⁶ The pain of love sharpens the lover's *dhaug*, 'taste' or 'intuition,' and makes him abandon any carnal desires.⁸⁷ Sanā'ī states that love is nectar mingled with poison, a delight mixed with pain, it is a painful medicine for those who have no pain.⁸⁸

Aḥmad Ghazālī describes love as affliction in a number of places in the *Sawānīh*, especially in chapters 16, 17, 53, 59 and 60. The author surmises:

In reality love is affliction. Intimacy and rest are odd and temporary, because in matters of love, separation is in reality duality while union is in reality oneness. The rest is a fantasy of being united and not the reality of union itself. (. . .)

Love is affliction, how can I abstain from affliction,
as at night love falls in sleep, I will rise in its stead.
People advise me to keep myself far from affliction;
affliction is my heart, how can I abandon my own heart?⁸⁹

According to Ghazālī, when the lover remains in a suffering state, he identifies love with affliction. The author takes affliction and love's (or the beloved's) oppression as the "fuel of love's fire."⁹⁰ The lover's heart is described as a "self-persevering castle" which is the fortress of affliction.⁹¹ In Ghazālī's philosophy, love feeds upon two kinds of

⁸⁵ As quoted by Bahār, *Sabk-shināsī*, Vol. 2, p. 243.

⁸⁶ *Ṭarīq ut-tahqīq: a Critical Edition With a History of the Text and a Commentary*, ed. B. Utas, Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1973, p. 38, ll. 670-77; for information about the attribution of this book's authorship to Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad an-Nakhjawānī with the *takhalluṣ* al-Jāmī see *Ṭarīq ut-tahqīq*, ed. B. Utas, pp. 42-8 and chapter 3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29, l. 521.

⁸⁸ *Dīwān*, p. 827, gh. 61. In another poem, Sanā'ī states that the poison of love also possesses sugar. See *ibid.*, p. 843, gh. 86.

⁸⁹ *Sawānīh*, pp. 32-3, *faṣl* 16, ll. 2-7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80, *faṣl* 53 (1), l. 3; cf. 'Abdullāh Anṣārī, *Parda*, in *Sukhanān-i pīr-i Harāt*, ed. M.J. Sharī'at, Tehran: Sipīhr, 1361, p. 55: "You are the fuel and the beloved's love is the fire, add fuel to the fire and burn happily." Cf. Nāğaurī, *Lawā'ih*, p. 100, where the author identifies the fuel of love as the lover's body, soul, heart and eye.

⁹¹ *Sawānīh*, p. 38, *faṣl* 20 (1), l. 2.

nutriments: while the lover is still in its preliminary stages, love is nurtured by the oppression of the beloved; and when the lover attains a higher stage, and divests himself of any external reality and achieves the state of unity, love is nourished through oneness. For Ghazālī, affliction is an indispensable factor in triggering the convergence of love, lover and beloved. In fact, Ghazālī identifies both affliction and oppression as the beloved's twin instruments by which she feeds herself. The beloved wipes out the lover's identity by these instruments. Being in an afflicted state, the lover desires to be annihilated, not only to free himself from pain, but more importantly to be united with the beloved by means of annihilation.

Ghazālī believes that the sign of love's perfection appears when the beloved becomes an affliction for the lover. Such an affliction must so encircle the lover's entire body and psyche that he cannot endure the burden of it, and he desires his own annihilation "at the door of non-existence." The constant state of affliction in which the lover finds himself finally rewards him, by letting him witness the beloved at the moment of annihilation. At the moment the lover enters the state of annihilation, the beloved receives him and releases him from pain.⁹²

The lover has to accept the beloved's oppression (*jafā*) in the same way that he accepts her fidelity (*wafā*).⁹³ Hujwīrī illustrates this point very well by the story of the mystic Abū Bakr ash-Shiblī (d. 334/946). After being accused of madness, this mystic was taken to a hospital. When his disciples come to visit him, he throws stones at them, making them flee. Then, he says to them, "If you are my friends, why do you flee from me? A friend does not flee when he is afflicted by his friend."⁹⁴ Ghazālī considers the beloved's affliction and oppression as her mangonel by which she destroys the lover's ego and obliges him to assume her qualities. Ghazālī goes one step further saying, there is no difference whether the beloved shoots arrows of fidelity or oppression. The lover should regard it an honour that the beloved has chosen him amongst the people. It was perhaps under the impact of Ghazālī that later mystic poets assigned a special place to affliction in love poetry. Romantic poets such as Nizāmī also describe love and its working as pain and affliction.

⁹² Ghazālī dwells on this topic in chapters 59 and 60.

⁹³ *Sawānīh*, pp. 38–9, *fasl* 20 (1–2), ll. 2–12.

⁹⁴ *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 404.

CHAPTER TWO

“NIZĀMĪ, THE WORLD’S WORD-MAGICIAN”¹

sukhan guftan-i bīkr jān suftan ast
na har kas sazā-yi sukhan guftan ast

To write peerless poetry is to dig into the soul
*not everyone is worthy to versify.*²

1. *The poet and his work*

Before Nizāmī started his career as a poet in the twelfth century, the Persian language had been used in both poetry and prose for almost four centuries. Various genres of poetry, including heroic, homiletic, mystic, lyric, erotic and romantic came to maturity at the hands of poets such as Firdausī, Sanā’ī, Gurgānī, Farrukhī and dozens of other writers. Nizāmī was aware of the great achievement of his predecessors but did not slavishly imitate them, rather he synthesised all these genres in his poems and added something new. Comparing him to Firdausī, C.E. Wilson observes that Nizāmī’s “thoughts are deeper, his expression is more trenchant, crisp and epigrammatic, though perhaps often more studied and artificial, and generally more obscure and subtle. In plain narrative he is equally flowing and perspicuous, whilst in situations requiring exalted imagination and dramatic force he is superior.”³ According to J. Rypka, “Nizāmī’s great virtues are his wealth of ideas, his powerful imagination and infinite religious depth, command of *le mot juste*, perfect poetic technique, ability to choose and order his material, philosophic profundity and understanding of social questions; indeed he often voices the attitude of the towns.”⁴ Apart from dozens of his

¹ *Laylī u Majnūn*, chapter 9:6b.

² *Sharaf-nāma*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 47.

³ C.E. Wilson, *The Haft Paikar*, London: Arthur Probsthain, 1924, pp. xvi–xvii.

⁴ J. Rypka, “Poets and Prose Writers of the Late Saljuq and Mongol Periods” in *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 5, ed. J.A. Boyle, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 583.

emulators, who adulate Niẓāmī, many other classical poets, among whom, the celebrated lyricist Ḥāfiẓ of Shīrāz (d. 791/1389) praised his work.⁵

In addition to his *Dīwān*, which contains 1,989 couplets, Niẓāmī wrote five long epic poems, dedicating each of them to a ruler.⁶ These five poems, comprising almost 31,600 lines, are called *Khamṣa* (*Quintet*) or *Panj-ganj* (*Five Treasures*).⁷ They generated a long list of imitations in various Islamic languages. The first of the five is the mystico-didactic epic *Makhzan al-asrār* (*The Treasury of Secrets*) (570/1174–75), an artistic imitation of Sanāʾī's *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa*. It is dedicated to Bahrām Shāh, who rewarded the poet with 5,000 *ḍīnārs*. With this first poem, Niẓāmī immediately established his reputation as a poet even outside his province: the ruler of Darband appreciated it so much that he sent him as a gift a beautiful slave girl, named Āfāq. Niẓāmī loved her dearly and married her in 569/1173–74; she gave him a son to whom Niẓāmī refers several times in *Laylī and Majnūn*. His happy marriage proved to be of short duration, because around 576/1181 Āfāq died. Her death coincided with a request from Tughril II, who invited the poet to write a love story. Niẓāmī chose his subject-matter from Firdausī's romantic episode of the Sasanian king Khusrau II and Shīrīn, combining it with the techniques employed in Gurgānī's Parthian romance *Wīs and Rāmīn*.⁸ Niẓāmī wrote *Khusrau and Shīrīn* as a memorial for his beloved wife Āfāq. It is here that he depicts a perfect picture of Shīrīn as an ideal woman who is the paragon of beauty, chastity, devotion and wisdom.

⁵ In one of his *ghazals*, Ḥāfiẓ states: "Ḥāfiẓ, your marvellous poetry is like a string of pearls from fine water / that sometimes surpasses the grace of Niẓāmī's verse." See *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, p. 936, gh. 460, 10. For Niẓāmī's impact on Ḥāfiẓ see H. Jāwīd, *Ḥāfiẓ-i jāwīd*, Tehran: 'Ilmī wa Farhangī, 1375, pp. 135–266. Jāwīd's analysis shows Ḥāfiẓ's indebtedness to Niẓāmī.

⁶ In classical anthologies such as Daulatshāh of Samarqand's *Tadhkirat ash-shu'arā'*, it is suggested that Niẓāmī's *Dīwān* contains more than 20,000 couplets, which as Sa'īd Nafīsī has shown, may not be true. Nafīsī rightly maintains that all manuscripts of the *Dīwān* from around the world should be compared before we can pass a judgement regarding the number of verses in the *Dīwān*. See *Dīwān-i qaṣā'id wa ghazaliyyāt-i Niẓāmī*, Tehran: Furūghī, no date, pp. 130–33; also see 'A.Ḥ. Zarrīnkūb, *Pir-i Ganja dar justijū-yi nākujā-ābād*, Tehran: Sukhan, 1374, p. 203.

⁷ J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *EI*, under *Khamṣa*; S. Nafīsī, introduction to Niẓāmī's *Dīwān-i qaṣā'id*, pp. 72–121.

⁸ Among the elements Niẓāmī draws from Gurgānī are the poem's metre, the exchange of ten letters, the description of night, etc.

Nizāmī wrote his third epic *Laylī and Majnūn* (584/1188) in less than four months, at the request of Abū 'l-Muẓaffar Shirwānshāh Akhsitān. This romance has proved to be one of the most imitated love stories in the vast Islamic world, especially in those countries in which Persian culture has been cultivated from the twelfth century onwards. The poem was popular among people from the Malay Peninsula to India, Turkey and Africa. Naturally there are a great number of imitations of this poem in the various languages spoken by Muslims.⁹ Critics have compared its popularity in the East to the position of William Shakespeare's (1564–1616) *Romeo and Juliet* in the West. *Laylī and Majnūn*, along with Nizāmī's other works, have been splendid sources of inspiration for miniature paintings, tapestries, woodcarving, carpet-weaving, tile-work, enamel-ware and calligraphy. The romance is also used in folk ballads, pop music, stage and film.¹⁰

He completed his fourth epic, *Haft paykar* (*Seven Beauties*), an ingeniously structured and multi-interpretable poem, in 593/1197 and dedicated it to the prince of Marāgha, Aqsunqurid 'Alā' ad-Dīn Kurp-Arslān. P.J. Chelkowski has characterised this as a romance celebrating "love as a serious pastime,"¹¹ and it is without doubt the most erotic romance in classical Persian literature. The poet's last epic *Iskandar-nāma* (*The Book of Alexander*) is divided into two parts: *Sharaf-nāma* (*Book of Honour*) and *Iqbāl-nāma* (*Book of Fortune*). In the first part Alexander appears as a king and warrior; in the second part his character gradually changes into a philosopher, a sage and a prophet.¹²

⁹ See J.T.P. de Bruijn in *EI*, under *Madjnūn Laylā*, 2. In Persian, Kurdish and Pashto literature; B. Flemming in *EI*, under *Madjnūn Laylā*, 3. In Turkish literature; J.A. Haywood in *EI*, under *Madjnūn Laylā*, 4. In Urdu literature.

¹⁰ For an analysis of these two romances see J.W. Clinton, "A Comparison of Nizami's Layli and Majnun and Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet" in *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love, and Rhetoric*, eds. K. Talattof & J.W. Clinton, New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp. 15–27; also see 'A.A. Hikmat, *Romeo wa Juliet-i William Shakespeare, muqāyasa bā Laylī u Majnūn-i Nizāmī-yi Ganjavī*, Tehran: Berūkhīm, 1314.

¹¹ P.J. Chelkowski, *Mirror of the Invisible World: Tales from the Khamseh of Nizami*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975, p. 7.

¹² The best biography on Nizāmī in Persian thus far is that of S. Nafīsī, *Dīwān-i qaṣā'id*, pp. 1–217; also see M. Tharwat, *Ganjīna-yi hikmat dar āthār-i Nizāmī*, Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1370, pp. 13–61; for a substantial bibliography of Nizāmī's works see A. Rādfar, *Kutāb-shināsī-yi Nizāmī-yi Ganjavī*, Tehran: Pazhūhishgāh, 1371; also see K. Talattof, "International Recognition of Nizami's Work: A Bibliography" in *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi*, pp. 189–204; for a biography of Nizāmī in English see J. Scott Meisami's introduction in *Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*, Oxford:

Nizāmī is usually known as a court poet, but he actually avoided a close association with monarchs and chose a solitary life in his native town Ganja; he reluctantly left the town only once, around 581/1185, when Qizil Arslān, the ruler of Azarbaijān, wished to meet him. In his poems, Nizāmī does not present himself as an average court poet, who invariably praises his patron, but rather as a wise advisor, who at times even severely criticises the kings and repeatedly defends the oppressed men, dervishes, old women, farmers, etc. In *Haft paykar*, the poet puts himself on a par with Aristotle, Buzurgmihr and Bārbad, who served Alexander, Anūshīrwān and Khusrau Parwīz respectively.¹³ In the last chapter of *Laylī and Majnūn*, Nizāmī offers a long list of counsels for Shirwānshāh; he advises him to be aware of life's transient nature, to respect and protect his subjects, to ask others' opinions before making a decision, to think of the consequences of his action, etc. Furthermore, Nizāmī repeatedly advises the reader to avoid associating with kings because "although the fire (a king) is full of light, he is safe who is remote from it."¹⁴ In another place, the poet compares the king to a vine that leans on other trees to climb.

Nizāmī lived a secluded life and even his royal patrons respected the poet's lifestyle. When Qizil Arslān invited Nizāmī to his banquet, he ordered the servants to remove the wine, to cancel the music and to stop the dancers out of respect for the poet.¹⁵ Nizāmī refers to his withdrawal several times in his writings. In many of the passages in which a reference is made to his asceticism, the poet links it with the quality of his poetry. In *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, Nizāmī states that although the mouth of his asceticism is dry, his tongue of fresh dates (*lisān ar-ruṭab*) is the Fount of Life, it is like musk which has acquired its scent from solitude.¹⁶ Nizāmī believes that in solitude the heart turns into a vast ocean from which rivers flow.¹⁷ In *Sharaf-nāma*, he compares himself to the mythical bird Sīmurgh which

World's Classics, 1995, pp. vii-xv; also see J. Rypka, "Poets and Prose Writers," pp. 577-84; P.J. Chelkowski, *Mirror of the Invisible World*, pp. 1-10; idem, in *EL*, under Nizāmī Gandjawi.

¹³ *Haft paykar*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, pp. 31-2.

¹⁴ *Laylī u Majnūn*, p. 98, l. 88.

¹⁵ Nizāmī recounts this meeting in an animating way in the last chapter of *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwātiyān, chapter 100, pp. 736-52, see especially p. 741, l. 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101, ll. 27-8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 112, l. 25.

resides on Mount Qāf in sheer solitude. Alluding to his isolation as well as his poetry, Nizāmī likens himself to a "bee that possesses a hundred-coloured honey in its narrow home."¹⁸ Often he speaks of himself as a mine in which he diligently digs precious stones, or an ocean from which he fishes peerless pearls.¹⁹

It is sometimes suggested that Nizāmī had some inclinations towards *Akhīs*, a certain artisan guild in Anatolia, comparable to the *futuwwa* brotherhoods in other parts of the Islamic world. Daulatshāh's statement that Nizāmī belonged to the Order of Akhī Faraj Zanjānī has no solid basis. As S. Nafīsī has pointed out, at the time that Akhī Faraj died, Nizāmī was only seventeen years old, and it is incorrect to regard him as one of Faraj's followers. Moreover, if Nizāmī had belonged to any mystical affiliation, he would have mentioned his 'spiritual master' (*pīr*) in his poems, as was usual in those days.²⁰ What is certain is that Nizāmī had affinities with the ideology of such brotherhoods, and that he frequently dwells on the ideas of chivalry in his romances, especially in *Laylī and Majnūn*, in which Majnūn is portrayed as a spiritual chevalier.²¹

Nizāmī has also been popular in the West from at least the eighteenth century. Although his reception in Europe requires a separate study, I will touch here upon the main aspects.²² We may start with Puccini's opera *Turandot* (Persian *Tūrāndukht*), which is inspired by Nizāmī's tale of the red pavilion in *Haft paykar*. The tale first appeared in Italian in Venice in 1557, in a volume entitled *Peregrinaggio*

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 87, l. 31; for Nizāmī's relation to the courts see J.E. Bertel's *Izbrannye Trudy*, p. 233.

¹⁹ This ascetic way of life does not mean that the poet was a dry or dull person, quite the opposite. As E.G. Browne has put it: "And if his genius has few rivals amongst the poets of Persia, his character has even fewer. He was genuinely pious, yet singularly devoid of fanaticism and intolerance, self-respecting and independent, yet gentle and unostentatious, a loving father and husband. In a word, he may be justly described as combining lofty genius and blameless character in a degree unequalled by any other Persian poet." *A Literary History of Persia*, Cambridge: At the University Press, 1956, Vol. 2, p. 403.

²⁰ *Dīwān-i qasā'id*, ed. S. Nafīsī, pp. 20-1; M. Tharwat, *Ganjīna-yi hikmat*, p. 37; see also F. Taeschner in *EI*, under Akhī.

²¹ See *infra*, chapter 13, pp. 299-310.

²² Although John D. Yohannan and Kaukab Saffārī refer to several studies on Nizāmī from the eighteenth century onwards, an elaborate study is a desideratum. See Yohannan, *Persian Poetry in England and America*, New York: Caravan Books, 1977, index, under Nizāmī; Šaffārī, *Afsānahā wa dāstānā*, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tehran, 1357, pp. 185-91. This book was originally written in French under the title of *Les légendes*, Paris: Les presses du Palais-Royal, 1972.

di tre figlioli del re di Serendippo (*Adventures of the Three Sons of the King of Serendip*). The book was translated by Christoforo Armeno and is an adaptation of Amīr Khusrau of Delhi's (651–725/1253–1325) *Hasht bihisht*, itself an imitation of Nizāmī's *Haft paykar*. The Venetian playwright Carlo Gozzi used this translation for his play *Il re cervo*, which then served Puccini in composing his *Turandot*.²³

As far as English reception of Nizāmī is concerned, it was Sir William Jones (1746–1794) who introduced Nizāmī to the English world. He translated twenty anecdotes of Nizāmī's *Makhzan al-asrār* and also published a Persian edition of Hātif's (d. 927/1520) *Laylī and Majnūn*, an imitation of Nizāmī's romance in 1788. Isaac D'Israeli, inspired by this love story, adapted it into English. This was in turn immediately put into an opera entitled, *Kais, or Love in the Deserts: An Opera in Four Acts* by William Reeve. It was "performed with unbounded applause at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane."²⁴ Further Western imitations of the poem did not appear until 1963, when Louis Aragon (1897–1982), one of the leading representatives of the Surrealist movement, bemoaned his love for his beloved in *Le Fou d'Elsa*. Aragon's version was based on Jāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn*, again an imitation of Nizāmī's version.²⁵ In German, J.W. Goethe (1749–1832) versified Nizāmī's tale from *Makhzan al-asrār* about Jesus and a dead dog in *West-östlicher Diwan*.²⁶

2. Nizāmī's language and style

Nizāmī is usually admired for his unparalleled use of language and his unique style. Peter J. Chelkowski describes Nizāmī and his style as follows: "The tension between the fantasy and the purity of his

²³ See P. Chelkowski, "Āyā upirā-yi Turandot-i Puchini bar asās-i kushk-i surkh-i haft paykar-i Nizāmī ast" in *Irānshināsī*, No. 4, Vol. 3, Winter 1992, pp. 714–22.

²⁴ See J.D. Brown and S.S. Stratton, *British Musical Biography*, London: Da Capo Press, 1897, Vol. 2, p. 119; Johan D. Yohannan attributes this opera erroneously to Charles Brandon. See *Persian Poetry in England and America*, p. 32.

²⁵ For a comparative analysis of this romance see J. Hādīdī, *Az Sa'dī tā Aragon*, Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Danishgāhī, 1373, pp. 473–92; also see A.E. Khairallah, "The Individual and Society: Šalāh 'Abdassabūr's Laylā wal-Majnūn" in *Gesellschaftlicher Umbruch und Historie*, ed. J.C. Bürgel & S. Guth, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995, pp. 162–63; idem, *Love, Madness and Poetry*, pp. 106–25, 130–35.

²⁶ J.W. Goethe, *West-östlicher Diwan*, München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1998, pp. 168–69; for this story see *infra*, chapter 8:1, pp. 140–41.

expression mirrors perfectly the tension between the eroticism and the asceticism of his plots. Nizāmī is like a magical ice-skater who, within a set range of figures, performs ever more varied and exquisite arabesques until he mesmerizes the beholder."²⁷ While Jan Rypka observes: the poet "comes first not only as a socially conscious philosopher but also as a psychologist, a story-teller, a verbal artist and a rhetorical virtuoso," C.E. Wilson compares Nizāmī's style to European poets by stating: "Nizāmī (. . .) like many European poets is unconventionally obscure. He employs images and metaphors to which there is no key save in the possession of the poetic sense and sound judgement."²⁸

Nizāmī describes his own style as *gharīb*, meaning 'rare,' 'unique,' 'strange,' or *nau*, 'new,' 'novel.'²⁹ He refers to himself as the magician of words whose name is "the mirror of the invisible."³⁰ He truly believes that his words should have the same effect as the spell of a magician. He enchants the reader through the magic of his language and his irresistible metaphors. Time and again, the reader is surprised, perhaps by an unexpected bent towards mysticism, or by the poet's simple word-choice, witty epigrams, and abundant use of exquisite imagery, similes and original conceits. Nizāmī strives to strike a perfect balance between profane and mystical love in his writing: even when he deals with a profane subject, his language is permeated with mystical terms, motifs and metaphors. In fact, due to this balance, the poet's most profane romances such as *Khusrau and Shīrīn* and *Haft paykar* are open to a mystical interpretation.³¹ None of his many imitators have reached the degree of perfection attained in Nizāmī's narration.

The poet's perceptive use of rhetorical figures, and his coining of new words, new compounds and phrases, constitute an integral part

²⁷ *Mirror of the Invisible World*, pp. 8-9.

²⁸ See "Poets and Prose Writers of the Late Saljuq and Mongol Periods" in *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 5, p. 578 and C.E. Wilson, *The Haft Paikar*, p. xvi, respectively.

²⁹ See *Sharaf-nāma*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 28, l. 10; also see *Dīwān-i Nizāmī*, ed. S. Nafīsī, p. 256, l. 557.

³⁰ *Laylī u Majnūn*, chapter 9, l. 6.

³¹ See N. Pūrjawādī, "Shīrīn dar chishma" and "'Ishq-i Khusrau wa 'ishq-i Nizāmī" in *Bū-yi jān*, Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Dānishgāhī, 1372, pp. 148-70 and 171-78 respectively. Pūrjawādī gives a highly mystical interpretation of the famous bathing scene; also compare C.E. Wilson (*The Haft Paikar*, introduction) who presents a mystical interpretation of the romance.

of his style.³² Firdausī had also coined numerous words and compounds.³³ Alluding to Nizāmī's ingenious inventiveness, P.J. Chelkowski states: "(...) Nizāmī was not only a painter with words, but a sculptor or architect, who, using simple bricks as his medium, builds palaces of breathtaking color, form and intricacy."³⁴ The creative compounds, which he uses to beautify the body of his narrative, are a central characteristic in his intricate style. These compounds are usually presented as part of other poetical devices such as metaphors. These poetic tools are used not only to adorn the poet's speech, but also to highlight an aspect of a character, a setting or a situation. They are an essential part of Nizāmī's narrative technique. In what follows I will turn my attention first to Nizāmī's new compounds and secondly, to Nizāmī's use of some of the most recurrent rhetorical devices.

The examples chosen here are metaphorical compounds describing the cosmos and the world. These are among the most frequent subjects for metaphorical treatment. The sky, for example, is described as: 'the flowing water' (*āb-i rawān*); 'the blue circle' (*chanbar-i kabūd*); 'the blue garden' (*gulshan-i kabūd*); 'the vessel of the Sphere' (*khunbara-yi falak*); 'the heart-ravishing portico' (*rawāq-i dil-kash*); 'the nine litters' (*nuh 'amārī*); 'the nine cradles' (*nuh mahd*); 'the seven pairs of compasses' (*haft-pargār*); 'the seven silks' (*haft-parand*); 'the seven elevated fortresses' (*haft-ḥiṣār-i barkashīda*); 'the seven treasuries' (*haft-khazīna*); and 'the seven waves' (*haft-mauj*). When the poet refers to the sun, he uses the compounds: 'the eye of creation' (*chashm-i āfarīnīsh*), 'the Chinese mirror' (*āyīna-yi chīnī*), 'the sky-travelling lamp' (*chirāgh-i āsmān-gard*), 'the [golden] ankle-ring of the Sphere' (*khalkhāl-i falak*), 'the royal rider of the whirling Wheel' (*shah-suwār-i charkh-i gardān*), 'the Joseph-faced from the East' (*Yūsuf rukh-i mashriqī*). When Nizāmī

³² W. Dastgirdī gives a glossary of Nizāmī's neologisms, which includes several hundred words and compounds. As W. Dastgirdī himself admits, his list is not complete. See Nizāmī, *Ganjīna-yi Ganjavī*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, pp. 2-170. The fifteenth-century poet Jāmī complained about Nizāmī's unusual style, saying that there are five hundred or a thousand couplets which are puzzling and we should catch Nizāmī's skirt on Judgement Day and ask him to explain their meanings. See *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 181.

³³ For a short list of these words and compounds see Gh. Yūsufi, "Zabān-i Firdausī wa zabān-i mā" in *Barghā'i dar āghūsh-i bād*, Tehran: Ilmī, 1378, Vol. 1, pp. 140-44.

³⁴ P.J. Chelkowski, *Mirror of the Invisible World*, p. 8.

wants to say that the sun rises, he introduces the phrase 'the smile of the yellow rose' (*khanda-yi gul-i zard*). Most of the above compounds and phrases related to the sun are used only once. In each case the poet seeks to achieve a particular effect in his narrative. In other words, the compounds and images are welded together with various elements of the narrative to enhance its force.³⁵ For example, in the following couplet, a yellow rose stands for the sun:

From the world-travelling Wheel thousands of narcissi
came down before a yellow rose could come up.³⁶

Drawing on conventional floral imagery, the poet says that the yellow rose appears only when the narcissi have finished flowering. The flowers come to represent the stars and the sun by symbolic association: the word 'narcissus' (*nargis*) is a metonym of the eye, which is in turn sometimes a metonym for the stars.³⁷ Thus, the rose blooms after the narcissi, the sun rises only when the stars fade away.

Nizāmī compares the stars with the eye in chapter 34:36 of *Laylī and Majnūn*, in the episode of Majnūn with a black raven. Here he compares the night to the jet-black hue of the raven's feathers and the stars to the raven's shiny eyes. Having compared the eyes to the stars, the poet creates another layer of interpretation in the next line:

Like a night whose light is dead
Majnūn had fallen down, a raven had stolen his eyes.

In this couplet, the poet refers to three aspects of Majnūn's character: first of all, he places Majnūn's separation and sorrow in a starless night; secondly, the poet alludes to the ill nature of the raven, which according to Persian ornithomancy and literary tradition sometimes brings bad luck. Finally, there is a reference to Majnūn's unlucky star; or to be more accurate, to his lack of any star: his stars have been stolen by a bird of ill omen, therefore, he is unfortunate.

In another place, Nizāmī describes the sunrise, at a point in which the narrative is speaking of a war. He compares the night to a black

³⁵ For a more extensive analysis of Nizāmī's techniques in depicting time and setting including the sunrise and sunset, see *infra*, chapter 14:2-3, pp. 314-22.

³⁶ *Khusrau u Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwatyān, p. 184, l. 59.

³⁷ H. Ritter, *Über die Bildersprache Nizāmīs*, Berlin/Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1927, p. 23.

serpent and associates negative qualities with the dawn. The sunrise is compared to the most vicious king of Persian mythology, *Ḍaḥḥāk*.³⁸

As the black serpent picked up its beads
Ḍaḥḥāk of the dawn smiled
 In the hands of warriors without fear
 lances became like the serpents of *Ḍaḥḥāk*.
 (chapter 29, ll. 72-3)

In the first couplet, the night is compared to a serpent, but so, implicitly, is the day, for the bloodthirsty *Ḍaḥḥāk*, bore man-eating serpents on his shoulders. The serpent of the dawning day and its malicious quality become explicit as the poet compares the lances to *Ḍaḥḥāk*'s serpents. Thus each of *Nizāmī*'s images is integrated with the narrative theme at this point.

Instead of simply saying *dunyā*, *gīlī*, *ālam* or *jahān*, all denoting 'the world,' *Nizāmī* uses a wide range of metonyms including 'pit' (*chāh*), 'bridge' (*pul*), 'village' (*dih*), 'demon' (*dīw*), 'way-house' (*khāna-yi rahīl*), 'a jar covered with mud' (*khum-i gil-ālūd*), 'narrow little house' (*sarācha-yi tang*), 'a heart-cramping house' (*sarā-yi dilgīr*), etc. All these and many other metonyms and metaphoric references are based on the poet's ascetic and gnostic world-view. The material world is made of base substance, it is far from the spiritual world and should be avoided, as far as possible, because as long as man is trapped in the web of the world, he cannot release himself from its corruption and cannot achieve perfection.

Another remarkable feature of *Nizāmī*'s style is his avoidance of every-day words for human occupations, emotions and behaviour. He prefers to contrive new expressions, which usually entail a visual aspect. For instance, in chapter 4:94 of *Laylī and Majnūn*, he avoids saying 'the astrologers' (*siṭāra-shināsān*), choosing instead 'the seekers of the height' (*bālā-ṭalabān*). The poet invents this new compound in a context in which he describes heaven using the poetic device of *iltizām*, that is when the poet obliges himself to use a word or a set of words in several consecutive lines. Here *Nizāmī* plays on the word *bālā*, 'high,' or 'height.' His new compound, which has a mystical overtone, is easily understood by the Persian reader.

³⁸ *Ḍaḥḥāk* is a mythical king of Arab stock, on whose shoulders two serpents grow. These have to be fed each day with the brain of a Persian boy. The story of *Ḍaḥḥāk* is recounted in Firdausī's *Shahnama*, ed. Dj. Khaleghi-Motlagh, Vol. 1, Costa Mesa, 1366, pp. 55-86.

In another place (12:22), the poet uses the phrase 'to have a thousand wings grow from the foot' (*az pāy hazār par bar-āwardan*) to refer directly to the act of dancing, but he also wants us to see how emotions are set loose after drinking wine. As an image of utter loneliness and the lack of any friend, the poet coins the phrase 'to carve a friend from wood' (*az chūb ḥarīf tarāshīdan*). That is, a person with no friend to talk to, talks to soulless objects, imagining that they are alive. To weep is 'to string tears' (*ashk dāna kardan*). In this metaphor, Nizāmī takes the compound verb 'to string pearls' and substitutes tears for pearls (the pearl itself being a metonym for tears). Weeping is also called 'the leaping of tears' (*ashk-khīzī*) and 'To wash the eyes with rosewater' (*ba gul-āb dāda shustan*). Instead of the verb 'to haste,' the poet prefers 'to have the wind behind oneself' (*bād az pas dāsh-tan*). When he describes how Majnūn hurries to Laylī's quarter, Nizāmī says: 'he had a thousand wings' (*hazār par dāsh*) or 'he ran like water into a well' (*mīraft chunānka āb dar chāh*). Instead of the verb 'to withdraw,' he uses 'to scrap a letter from the page' (*ḥarf az waraq siturdan*). The beloved's black and musky forelock is described as 'the musky parasol' (*chatr-i mushgīn*). Instead of saying 'rotten melon,' Nizāmī prefers, 'the melon bitten by a fly' (*kharbuza-yi magas gazīda*). The compounds he uses for the Four Elements, water, earth, wind and fire are numerous; the most used being the 'four roots' (*chār bīkh*), 'four horses' (*chār faras*), 'four houses' (*chār khāna*), and 'four gems' (*chār gauhar*). This list could go on for several pages but this is not the place to analyse Nizāmī's metaphorical sayings at length. It is hard to judge whether all of the above words and phrases are Nizāmī's own inventions, since some of them also occur in the works of previous poets. What is certain is that the effect Nizāmī creates in his narratives through this particular use of language is definitely novel. A separate study is needed to examine this aspect of Nizāmī's poetics.

The poet frequently refers to the posture of a musician playing on an instrument to depict a specific emotion. In chapter 16:13, when the poet depicts the lovers' sorrowful condition, he compares them to a 'harp' (*chang*) and a 'fiddle' (*rabāb*):³⁹ "Because of weeping, Laylī had a harp in her chest/like a *rabāb*, Majnūn's hand was

³⁹ For a study of the imagery of musical instruments see A.L.F.A. Beelaert, *A Cure for the Grieving: Studies on the Poetry of the 12th-Century Persian Court Poet Khāqānī Šīrwānī*, Leiden: Nederlandse Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2000, chapter six.

on his head." Ambiguity has an enormous power and function in Nizāmī's poetry. This couplet is open to two interpretations: since the word *chang* also means 'hand' (literally 'claw'), the first hemistich can be read: "Because of weeping, Laylī's hand was on her chest." This gesture shows how women beat and scratch themselves on the chest as a sign of wailing. There is a symmetry between plucking the strings of the harp and beating the chest with the palm. In another couplet (53:55), Nizāmī reveals Majnūn's desire to embrace Laylī with a musical image: "I shall embrace you like a lute (*rūd*) in the hand (*chang*)/I shall hide you like ruby in a stone." The first hemistich contains two homonyms: *rūd*, also means the 'string' of a musical instrument and *chang*, as mentioned above, also means 'harp.' Thus it can be read: "like a string in the harp, I shall embrace you."⁴⁰ Not only is the imagery striking, there is a symmetry between the couplet's form and content, and Majnūn's actions and feelings for Laylī. The harmony between lovers is expressed using this syntactic and semantic parallel structure.

Another salient feature of Nizāmī's style is the introduction of aphorisms. Long passages of *Laylī and Majnūn* are composed in epigrammatic style, and many of the poem's maxims have become proverbs.⁴¹ In chapter 5:57, complaining of the story's thin plot, Nizāmī frankly informs the reader: "And when I know not the way at some stage, clearly I shall then add some conceits." Among the most well-known of these expressions used today are "There is much hope in hopelessness/the end of the dark night is bright"; "perform good work and throw it into the pit, because it returns to you again from the pit," (meaning, one always receives the profit of a good work even if it seems to yield no benefit at the time); "he is manly who is humble"; "what use is patience in love"; "surely God is the friend of the friendless"; "it is not a wonder that a seed sprouts," (meaning that one should not give up hope); "how can one fight against a friend." In technical terms, to introduce a proverb into verse is called *irsāl al-mathal*, that is 'reasoning by illustration and

⁴⁰ See also chapter 21:23. Here, Majnūn's father invites him to return home so "That you (Majnūn) play the strings and I become excited, that you rend your garment and I my soul."

⁴¹ For the significance of the epigram in classical Persian see J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Elr*, under Epigram. Both B. Tharwatiyān and M. 'Ishqpur devote separate chapters to the expressions used in *Laylī and Majnūn*. See M. 'Ishqpur, *Tahqiq dar math-nawī-yi Laylī u Majnūn*, chapter 7 and *Laylī u Majnūn*, B. Tharwatiyān, pp. 695-732.

analogy.' Pointing to the abundance of proverbs and short illustrative anecdotes in Nizāmī's writings, 'A.Ḥ. Zarrīnkūb states that they are so numerous that one cannot call them *irsāl al-mathal* in the way rhetoricians understand the term: "they should be counted as a type of interpretation; they are one of the elements of the poet's poetic language."⁴² Zarrīnkūb states that the short maxims and proverbs are an indispensable part of Nizāmī's style, and that they are meant as guidelines to interpreting a particular passage.

Nizāmī often uses the rhetorical device of 'poetic aetiology' (*ḥusn-i ta'īl*), offering a fanciful explanation for a real fact. Some of these explanations have become common beliefs for Iranians. For example, in chapter 21:43, Majnūn's father advises him to busy himself with something in order to forget Laylī: "Why does the Indian scratch the head of the elephant?/he does it to make it forget India." If for one moment the Indian does not busy himself with the beast, it will remember its homeland.

The poem's didactic nature is evident not only in the use of concise and pithy expressions but also in the insertion of colloquial speech. The poet's language is idiomatically rich but stylistically deceptively relaxed and simple, especially in dialogues and monologues. As a *poeta doctus*, Nizāmī employs specialised terms from the fields of astrology, philosophy and mysticism, yet they do not harm his plain style.⁴³ Such terms are either carefully woven into the colloquial expressions of twelfth century Persia, or they are isolated somewhere in the narrative. For instance, when the poet desires to show his profound knowledge of astrology, he describes the constellations in the scene of the Prophet's "Night Journey" to heaven, and in the description of the night when Majnūn implores the stars to change his fortune.

At several points Nizāmī employs the poetic figure of anaphora, in which he depicts the various antithetical qualities of his protagonists. The following piece from chapter sixteen, in which the lovers' attributes are enumerated, may serve as an example. The anaphor section extends over 16 couplets:⁴⁴

⁴² *Pir-i Ganja*, p. 234.

⁴³ For Nizāmī's scientific knowledge see the excellent article by Christine van Ruymbeke "Nizami's Poetry Versus Scientific Knowledge: the Case of the Pomegranate" in *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love, and Rhetoric*, eds. K. Talattof & J.W. Clinton, New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp. 141-62.

⁴⁴ Other instances of anaphora occur in chapters 13:77-81; 25:59-65; 29:35-7,

Laylī nay, but the world enlightening dawn
 Majnūn nay, but a candle consuming itself
 Laylī nay, she was garden within garden
 Majnūn, I mistake, he was brand on brand
 Laylī was bright like the nimble moon
 Majnūn was weak before her like silk
 Laylī was planting rose bushes
 Majnūn was scattering pearls.
 (ll. 14-7)

Nizāmī also richly decorates his text with the thoughtful application of the rhetorical figure of *tanāsub* or *murā'āt-i naẓīr*, that is, 'the harmonic use of related images' or 'congruence of poetic ideas.' Our first example describes Laylī's suffering:

She was burning through the fire of separation
 neither smoke nor light showed in her.
 (chapter 24:36)

In this couplet four elements are brought together harmoniously to stress Laylī's agonising state: the words 'fire,' 'burning,' 'smoke,' and 'light' form a coherent whole. In the next couplet, the words 'musician,' 'organ,' 'melody,' 'note,' and 'sang' are used to form related images.

The musician who played this melody on the organ
 sang in this way according to the melody.
 (chapter 32:1)

Since the word *parda*, translated here as 'melody,' also means 'curtain,' the second hemistich may also be read: "(. . .) sang from behind the curtain in this way."

Nizāmī also inserts the poetic device of 'hyperbole' (*mubālagha*) in his narrative. Hyperbole was very popular with other epic poets such as Firdausī, but in Nizāmī's hands it does not lead to implausible comparisons, Nizāmī's hyperbolic passages usually have an elegant tone, as in the following section in chapter 25, in which Laylī is described in a garden:⁴⁵

57-8; 42:40-3. Nizāmī's imitators have adopted this aspect of Nizāmī's poetics. See, for instance, Amīr Khusrau-yi Dihlawī, *Laylī u Majnūn*, ed. T.A. Muharramov, Moscow: Institutū-yi Khāwarshināsī, 1964, pp. 18-9, ll. 12-9; pp. 38-9, ll. 20-3; p. 78, ll. 68-73; p. 139, ll. 90-5; p. 167, ll. 9-12; pp. 177-78, ll. 125-28; p. 253, ll. 37-9.

⁴⁵ Another example of hyperbole occurs in chapter 7:7-8: "If your sermon is

Wherever her breeze arrived
lilies sprouted and roses bloomed.
On every meadow over which she washed her hands
box-trees came out and cypresses grew.
(ll. 44-5)

Nizāmī's romance is a treasury saturated with poetical figures and metaphors and we cannot deal with all of them here. To conclude this brief analysis of Nizāmī's style, I refer to the poet's use of 'antithesis' (*mutadādd*), 'antistrophe' (*aks*), 'repetition' (*mukarrar*), and 'allusion' (*talmīh*), all of which are used frequently. In chapter 1:40, 'favour' and 'wrath,' and 'poison' and 'sweet drink' form the antitheses. The poet usually introduces at least one pair of antithesis in each hemistich:

Whether you act with favour or wrath
poison and sweet drink are the same, coming from you.

The rhetorical device of '*aks*' is employed repeatedly in the poem.⁴⁶ In chapter 3:17, the poet plays on 'the Night of Power' (*shab-i qadr*) (Koran, 97:1-3), combining this with a homonym or 'perfect word-play' (*jinās-i tām*) on the word *qadr*, meaning 'value,' and 'power':

imshab shab- qadr-i tust bishtāb
qadr-i shab-i qadr-i khīsh daryāb

Hurry, tonight is your Night of Power
understand the value of your Night of Power.

Nizāmī often uses repetition (*mukarrar*) to emphasise intensity or immensity, often in relation to a human emotion. In the following verse (chapter 24:45) the poet describes Laylī's torrent of pearl-like tears; combining hyperbole with *murā'āt-i nazīr* association between the sea, pearl and ship:⁴⁷

blown on the earth/gold will come out of it instead of thistles/And if you coin
you die on a stone/no one will reach towards silver and gold."

⁴⁶ An example of '*aks*' is found in chapter 41:25, where it is combined with a play on the homographs 'man' (*mard*) and 'died' (*murd*). The '*aks*' is between the phrases *ān murd dar īn* and *nā īn dar ān murd* in the second hemistich: *ān mard kaz-īn hīsār jān burd/ān murd dar īn nā īn dar ān murd*: "The man who saved his soul from this fortress (of love)/it died in him and not he in it."

⁴⁷ Another example can be found in chapter 64:9 in which Majnūn dies on Laylī's grave while singing love poems for her: "He sang two or three couplets shedding tears upon tears/sprinkling two or three teardrops bitterly bitterly."

Seas, seas of pearls she brought forth;
ships, ships [of tears] she poured from her eyes.

Mukarrar is a device often used in colloquial Persian. The poet employs such techniques to relax his language and at the same time to express the intensity of emotions.

Literary allusion (*talmīḥ*) provides a compressed rhetorical effect. One remarkable instance occurs in the following couplet, in which the poet points at the manliness of the female mystic Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya (d. 185/801) by referring simultaneously to two stories. A reader who does not know one or other would miss Nizāmī's point. The line occurs in the fourth chapter of *Makhzan al-asrār*, in which he severely criticises the king's unmanliness and injustice, and urges him to follow the example of Rābi'a:

Behold what Rābi'a did to her own tresses
to nurse the fourth (*rābi'*) of those seven men.⁴⁸

With this minimal information, the poet refers to two tales: firstly, the story of Rābi'a and a thirsty dog in the desert, and secondly, the story of the Seven Sleepers recounted in the Koran. In the first, Rābi'a sees a dog dying in the desert, cuts off her hair and makes a rope from it. Then she undresses and attaches her clothing to the rope and casts it into a well. Pulling the bundle out, she uses the soaked clothes to drench the dog, saving the poor beast. But Nizāmī does not refer specifically to a dog, using instead the Koranic phrase 'the fourth' (*rābi'*), which occurs in the verse (18:22): "The sleepers were three: their dog was the fourth." In doing this, the poet plays on the words Rābi'a and *rābi'*, 'the fourth', while introducing an allusion to the Koranic story of the Seven Sleepers, in which a dog plays a role.

3. *The narrator's stance in Laylī and Majnūn*

Another salient feature of Nizāmī's style is his manner of narration. In addition to examining narrative elements, such as descriptions of time and settings, portrayal of characters and their relationships, the parts of the story that are reported rather than expressed in the

⁴⁸ *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 89, l. 8.

words or thoughts of the characters, and the narrator's commentaries, interpretations, judgements and generalisations, we can also study the persona and method of the narrator himself.⁴⁹ Nizāmī brought the Persian epic to its zenith through the faultless use of these basic elements of narration.

As Mieke Bal has observed, the narrator "is the most central concept in the analysis of narrative texts."⁵⁰ Like many narrators in classical texts, Nizāmī's narrator is external: he narrates from a superior position, neither participating in the story nor referring to himself as a character.⁵¹ He does, however, refer to himself as the narrator and identifies himself with Nizāmī several times. Such references do not dramatise the narrator, because he does not identify himself with a character. The narrator uses the first and the third person to narrate his story. The commentator's first-person commentaries and monologues give the poem a more direct tenor and dramatic effect, whereas most events are narrated in the third person. To create more attachment between the reader and specific characters such as Majnūn, the narrator gives him many chances to express his feelings in direct speech. The narrator has full control of the narrative and directs the reader in whatever direction he wishes.

What is more, the narrator interrupts the narrative at several points, to share a wisdom with us that the characters did not have. At the very beginning of the story, the narrator breaks in on the narrative, reminding the reader that Majnūn's father is not aware that what God does is in the 'best interest' (*maṣlaḥa*) of his creatures.⁵² Another notable interruption from the narrator occurs in chapter 26, in which Ibn Salām sees Laylī who "is like a blooming rose-garden" and determines to marry her. Here the narrator delicately shows his own attitude towards the character of Ibn Salām, by reminding us of what Ibn Salām was forgetting:

On seeing that shining lamp,
he hurried like the wind to find a solution,
unaware that, even if he was to offer a treasure,

⁴⁹ For these and other narrative elements see Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, London: Methuen, 1983, pp. 96–100; M.A. Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 82.

⁵⁰ M. Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, second edition, London: University of Toronto Press, 1997, p. 19.

⁵¹ For the external narrator see *ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵² See *infra*, chapter 9:3, pp. 163–67.

a lamp will never agree with the wind.
 As he returned to his native land from his journey
 he yearned for union with that moon (Laylī).
 It was as if he had forgotten this saying:
 'no one shall embrace the moon.'
 (ll. 10-3)

Such comments not only exhibit the universal knowledge of the narrator and his attitude to a character, they generate suspense in the story. The reader becomes curious to find out whether Ibn Salām can marry Laylī. There are a number of other interruptions from the narrator which are framed in the form of commentary.

The more explicit ideological statements are usually made in non-narrative comments, which may differ from the ideology implicitly contained in the story.⁵³ In Nizāmī's romance such statements are usually in the present tense, although they occur in the middle of the story, which is usually told in the past tense. By using the present tense, the narrator accentuates the universality and timelessness of the ideas expressed in such passages. The contrast between the narrator's use of the past and the present tense creates a distance between the worlds of the romance and the narrator. In his comments in the present tense, the narrator draws conclusions from the event he has recounted. The episodes preceding the narrator's comments function as parables, and the comments as morals. This is analogous to the structure of a moralistic fable that consists of a short tale and ends with a moralistic conclusion. Every time he switches from the past tense to the present, the narrator lifts himself, and the reader, out of the fictional world. In this way the narrator guides the reader through the story and gives clues for its interpretation.

In texts such as Nizāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn*, the narrator's observations embody the strong didactic aspect of the narrative; they can be removed from the story proper without really damaging the central plot.⁵⁴ These moral exhortations were often used separately by

⁵³ G. Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987, under 'Commentary'; see also M. Bal, *Narratology*, p. 31.

⁵⁴ In modern abridged publications of classical texts in Persian, and in translations from the Persian, these commentarial pieces are often removed. A good example is Colin Turner's recent prose rendering of Nizāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn*. He leaves out the majority of narrator's comments, the first twelve chapters that comprise a prologue to the poem, and the epilogue. One interesting feature of Turner's trans-

later compilers to make books of *adab*, 'etiquette' or 'refined and well-mannered conduct.' In addition to serving as guides for proper conduct such books also purport to lead men to a blessed position in the world hereafter. The most famous of these works with regard to Nizāmī is the *Khulāṣa-yi khamṣa* by an anonymous compiler, presumably from the sixteenth century, which was published for the first time by M.Th. Houtsma in Leiden.⁵⁵ This book consists of 37 short chapters dealing with a varied range of ethical subjects including honesty, patience, love, sustenance, contentment, generosity, justice and benevolence. The author of this book cites didactic lines, almost all of them in the present tense, from various writings of Nizāmī and brings them together under a heading. The interesting point is that although couplets from various chapters of a specific poem are cited, they form a coherent whole when they are put under each other. The cohesion is provided by the subject-matter, the use of the present tense, the frequent use of imperatives and the metre. Since these didactic couplets have a gnomic character and an epigrammatic formulation, many of them are used independently and have become proverbs in Persian.⁵⁶

The ideological comments offer the narrator the opportunity to speak about the cultural, ethical and philosophical views which he

lation is that he chooses a narrator like L. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, who digresses several times in the narrative. He has added the following statements to the chapter that tells the story of the king of Marw and his hounds: "Do animals not reflect man? Are the attributes present in beasts of the earth not merely an echo of human nature? Ponder this point while we digress awhile (...)." See *Layla and Majnūn by Nizāmī*, London: Blake, 1997, p. 159; see also James Atkinson's verse translation, *Laili and Majnun*, London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1836, which contains about three thousand lines. For an abridged Persian version of *Laylī and Majnūn* see H. Yaghmā'i, *Dāstān-hā-yi 'āshiqāna*, Tehran: Murwārīd, 1374, pp. 237-67; 'A.A. Sa'īdī Sīrjānī, *Sīmā-yi du zan*, Tehran: Nashr-i Nau, 1368, pp. 95-133: both authors leave out the narrator's statements. M. Khaz'al, *Kushishī bar manzūma-yi Laylī u Majnūn*, Tehran: Gulistāniyān, 1364. The title of this book is very misleading because it is not an attempt to analyse the romance but a popularised version of the story.

⁵⁵ See *Choix de Vers Tirés de la Khamṣa de Nizāmī*, ed. M.Th. Houtsma, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1921. Even in the twentieth century, Nizāmī's writings, particularly the narrator's comments from the romances, have been pieced together by Muḥammad Taqī Ja'farī to form an ethical work teaching man proper conduct. See *Hikmat, 'irfān wa akhlāq dar shī'r-i Nizāmī*, Tehran: Kayhān, 1370.

⁵⁶ B. Tharwātiyān has gathered a large number of lines from *Laylī u Majnūn* which are now used as proverbs (pp. 695-732). See also 'A.A. Shihābī, *Nizāmī, shā'ir-i dāstānsarā*, Tehran: Ibn Sīnā, 1334, pp. 250-51; J.T.P. de Bruijn in *Elr*, under Epigram; and the introduction to Dick Davis, *Borrowed Ware: Medieval Persian Epigrams*, London: Anvil, 1996, pp. 11-28.

shared with a wider community. They revolve predominantly around four topics: life's transience, inexorable fate, love and death. They are didactic in tone and mystical in nature, occupying almost one fourth of the story, excluding the prologue and epilogue. The large number of comments is not surprising, because as J.T.P. de Bruijn has pointed out, a "strong tendency towards didacticism has been a characteristic of Persian literature from the very beginning."⁵⁷ It is a tradition based in many respects on wisdom-literature, on the genre of the 'precept' (*andarz*). Didacticism was an integral part of the pre-Islamic literature of Iran and was used to instruct readers in irreproachable conduct.⁵⁸ As Dh.A. Šafā explains "Counsels (...) urge the individual to learn the conventions of social life, to make himself acceptable in cultured society by acquiring good manners and good speech, working hard and guarding against laziness, shunning falsehood and injustice, and always being truthful and honest, and generally to adorn himself with virtue, knowledge and skill."⁵⁹ After the advent of Islam and the rise of Sufism, the ascetic and devotional themes were incorporated into these topics. Nizāmī is a good example of a poet who weaves the indigenous Iranian tradition of didacticism into the devotional aspects of Islam. Firdausī and Sanā'ī include a large number of didactic comments in their works as well.⁶⁰ Nizāmī is highly skilled in the genre of didactic poetry. His *Makhzan* and *Iqbāl-nāma* are two well-known examples of this genre in Persian literature. Nizāmī's significance is that he used didactic comments systematically throughout his writings, a trait emulated by his imitators.

Many of the narrator's commentaries relate to life's transience and the inevitability of death. In these, everything worldly is scorned. The vocabulary is mystical and serves to reinforce the poem's spiritual nature. Lengthy narrator's statements, expressing the common Islamic view on life and death occur every time a character dies: after the death of Majnūn's father (41:20–65), his mother (50:69–79;

⁵⁷ For a concise background on the didactic aspect of Persian literature see J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, pp. 183–85.

⁵⁸ For this genre of literature in Middle Persian see S. Shaked in *Elr*, under *Andarz* i. in Pre-Islamic Iran.

⁵⁹ Dh.A. Šafā in *Elr*, under *Andarz*, ii. *Andarz* Literature in New Persian.

⁶⁰ For such commentary in Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma* see Dj. Khaleghi-Motlagh in *Elr*, under *Adab*, i. *Adab* in Iran. Although Khaleghi-Motlagh does not refer specifically to the narrators' commentary sections, most of his many examples are in the words of the narrator.

51:27-48), Laylī's husband (57:51-65), Laylī (61:88-118) and finally Majnūn (64:17-60). Following the numerous references to death and the world's transience in the prologue, the reader is brought back to meditate on these issues five times during the story. Since these passages are very similar, I shall quote only one, with selective couplets to illustrate the narrator's stance. The passage occurs in chapter 51, following the description of the death of Majnūn's mother. It is a typical piece of *andarz*, illustrating the inevitability of death, man's insignificance and the necessary insight into one's own imperfection and shortcomings; these should finally lead one to humility. It also contains gnostic ideas about the world and shows how man should develop his nature and reach perfection. Man is advised to be always aware of the fleeting quality of life. He should, therefore, behave in such a way that he does not depend on the material world any more, only then can he attain excellence:

A life whose foundation is based on decline
is one moment, even if it were a thousand years.
If life has the sign of death
who then possesses the means to deal with its coquetry?
O you who ignore inevitability of death and
are not aware that life should be abandoned,
how long will you deceive yourself?
In death your provision will be far from you.
Are you so weak-minded that
you have not gauged how far you are? (. . .)
Regard yourself from top to toe, see how small you are,
the spheres above you are so high! (. . .)
You possess two or three rusty pegs,
which you have gathered through alms,⁶¹
[And] out of delight in these small particles of possessions
you boast: "I am the lord of the world."
As long as you are in need of someone like you
your instrument remains always out of tune.⁶²
Only when you are safe from needfulness
will you attain to eminence.
(ll. 27-31, 35, 41 44)

⁶¹ *Zakāt* is one form of almsgiving, which a Muslim gives in order to purify or secure a blessing on the rest of his possessions.

⁶² The second hemistich can be read differently: "Your provision will always be empty." Or "Your vehicle will always be out of order."

Following this, the narrator exhorts the reader to rely on his own efforts. This echoes Niẓāmī's advice to his own son, whom he advises to rely on himself and not on the reputation of his father. The narrator's exhortation is also a daring and candid message to the king for whom the poem was actually written:

Like a torch, feed on the work of your hand,
like a candle, consume the essence of your own treasure
So that in the tradition of Niẓāmī,
the king of the world will be your slave.⁶³
(ll. 47-8)

Here the narrator identifies himself with Niẓāmī. Although it can be argued that a distance can be detected between the narrator and Niẓāmī in the above couplet, it is safer to interpret such identification within the Persian literary tradition. The use of a pen-name in the concluding couplets of a section is a device widely used in lyrical poetry. Niẓāmī employed this device in his other poems, and quite consistently in his mystico-didactic poem *Makhzan al-asrār*.⁶⁴

Love constitutes another main theme of the narrator's comments and is closely linked with life and death. He touches on the psychological aspects of lovers and how love operates in them, in long strophes and in monostichs and even hemistichs. The narrator's first monostich on love occurs in chapter 13:74, in which he describes Majnūn's falling in love: "To be drunk on the first wine is hard/it is a hard fall for those who have not yet fallen." Using a proverbial illustration (*irsāl al-mathal*), the narrator compares the experience of first love to the first experience of drunkenness and to the first time one falls down.

The narrator points at another aspect of love in chapter 14:18: "How on earth can patience have any profit in (matters of) love? The sun cannot be covered with mud." The image shows the impossibility of having patience while being in love. Such ideas about patience are common in love poetry. For instance, the narrator of *Wīs and Rāmīn* states that when love appears, it sets fire to the lover's

⁶³ The last hemistich can also be read as follows: "[so that] the world, instead of being your king, will be your slave."

⁶⁴ J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, p. 189; idem, in *EI*, under *Takhalluṣ*, 2. In the sense of pen-name; also see P.E. Losensky, "Linguistic and Rhetorical Aspects of the Signature Verse (*Takhalluṣ*) in Persian Ghazal" in *Edebiyât*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1998, pp. 239-71.

heart, burning reason and patience.⁶⁵ Nizāmī's narrator leans on a similar precept in chapter 17:8 to demonstrate that advice has no effect on a person who is deeply in love: "Although advice is a thousand times profitable/what room remains for advice when love arrives?"

One of the narrator's most direct observations on love is in chapter 18, in which he defines love as an eternal force which never abates. The interesting point is that he equates love to Majnūn; not only is Majnūn the archetype of a selfless lover, he is also the embodiment of love. This dimension of Majnūn's character developed in lyrical poetry following Nizāmī's era.⁶⁶ After ascribing such a high station to Majnūn, the narrator identifies himself as a follower of Majnūn:

A love, which is not everlasting,
is a play-thing for the lust of youth.
Love is that which does not decrease
which as long as it exists, does not deviate its step.
That love, which for ever and ever decreases,
is a foolish fantasy.
Because of his complete [gnostic] knowledge of love
Majnūn stands for the elevated name of love.
As long as he lived, he carried the burden of love,
like a rose he was happy with the breeze of love.
And now that his rose has wilted
the drops of him remaining are rosewater.
I, too, through this fragrant rosewater
make my water fresh in this brook.
(ll. 88-94)

Apart from giving a definition of love, there is an implicit forewarning about the death of Majnūn in the image of the rose and the rosewater. The rose attains a longer life by enduring the boiling water and being transmuted into rosewater. Likewise, Majnūn attains eternal life by enduring the hardship of the path of love. 'My water' in the last line refers to the narrator's story, which is perfumed by the legend of Majnūn. It can also refer to the tears of the narrator, shed while narrating this sad story.

In chapter 25:78b, the narrator makes a short comment on another aspect of love: "Whose heart is not contracted in [matters of] love?"

⁶⁵ *Wīs u Rāmīn*, p. 65, l. 12.

⁶⁶ For a discussion on this subject see *infra*, chapter 3.2, pp. 69-74.

Beginning with Laylī's feeling of separation, the narrator generalises to the universal situation of separated lovers. In chapter 45:100, the narrator comments on the lack of happiness of the separated lover: "In [matters of] love in which union can scarcely be found, happiness is either in a dream, or in imagination (*khayāl*)." Connected to the theme of union, the narrator pauses a while to ponder on the reason for Majnūn's avoidance of fulfilling his desire with Laylī in chapter 55:

He was not without desire;
 he put his desire in a sheath like a sword.
 He did not fulfil his desire through that *parī*-born
 so that the house of love remains thriving.
 (ll. 18-9)

To support his opinion on the wisdom of abstinence, the narrator asks for advice from an outsider, an anonymous 'wise master' (*ustād-i dānā*):

I asked the wise master
 about the state of the potent lover
 That although he had a way to his desire,
 what wisdom was it to postpone it?
 A desire, which could be fulfilled at that state,
 why did he not fulfil it in thirty years?
 (ll. 20-22)

The wise master answers:

He said: 'By fulfilling instantly his desire
 his body would be emptied of desire.
 By being so slow in satisfying it,
 he searched for his delight for thirty years.
 I will set my desire beyond the two worlds
 if I find a cup from that wine.'
 (ll. 23-5)

In this episode, even the narrator is subordinated to Majnūn's wisdom. He is baffled by Majnūn's action and looks at him with awe and respect. The narrator's consultation with the wise master can be taken as a strategy to assign a more superior place to Majnūn than to himself. The narrator suspects that the reader may fail to understand Majnūn, therefore, he consults another authority. In doing so, the narrator minimises the distance between the reader and himself, warrants his reliability and shows the reason why Majnūn does

not satisfy his desire. The unknown *ustād-i dānā*, who appears here, grows in later imitations of *Laylī and Majnūn* romances into a literary figure giving counsels on difficult aspects of love.⁶⁷

In chapter 40, borrowing chess imagery, the narrator refers to love's superior power and how the lover should approach love. The only way of dealing with such an unsurpassed force is humility and utter submission:

In [matters of] love where even an 'elephant' (*pīl*) is no more
than a pawn (*pīyāda*), he is chivalrous who acts with humility.⁶⁸ (. . .)
An arrow shot from the bow of love
always leaves a wound in the hand of the shooter.
(ll. 4,6)

The theme of submission to love is one of the central topics of the poem. In chapter 65, having shown the triviality of the terrestrial world, the narrator advises the reader to entrust himself to love. Love is the only key to the problems of the world. Nizāmī often compares the whole creation to a talismanic knot, which cannot be unravelled except by means of love. It is also through love that the hardship of life becomes easy. Nizāmī elaborates on this theme most extensively in *Khusrau and Shīrīn* in which the selfless lover, Farhād, works night and day without feeling any fatigue to dig a long tunnel in the mountain for his beloved Shīrīn. In *Laylī and Majnūn*, the narrator states:

Submit yourself to the sanctuary of love
so that you are instantly released from yourself.
In [matters of] love, run like an arrow
so that you do not remain far from the target.
The arrow is suited to the bow of the king
because it goes right to the target.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ In chapter fourteen of Hātifī's *Laylī u Majnūn*, Majnūn's father consults this authority who advises him to anoint Majnūn's eye with clay from Laylī's alley, so that he will stop crying and tearing his clothes. "If you desire that he stops crying/that he does not rend his garment any longer/Anoint his two tear-streaming eyes/with a pinch of the earth from the beloved's alley." See *Laylī Majnūn: A Persian Poem of Hātifī*, Calcutta: Manuel Cantopher, 1788, p. 31; also see Hātifī, *Laylī u Majnūn*, ed. S. Asadullayev, Dushanba: 1962, p. 45, ll. 867-68.

⁶⁸ In Persian the bishop is an elephant and the pawn, an infantryman. Thus the couplet means that in matters of love even a bishop is as powerless as a foot-soldier. The only way to spare one's life is to surrender oneself. For Persian chess terms see M. Dabīrsiyāqī, in *Elr*, under Chess.

⁶⁹ This line is ambiguous. Although the compound *rāst-kār* meaning 'righteous'

Love is the opener of the knot of existence,
 the deliverer from the vortex of self-worship.
 Any sherbet of sorrow that the soul may taste
 is the soul's relish when it is offered by love.
 Many a bitter wine, that is like poison,
 tastes excellent because of love.
 Although this sherbet is bitter of taste,
 why shall man fear since its cup-bearer is love?
 Although your state was to endure exertion,
 it was delightful since it was by the way of love.
 (ll. 46-53)

This passage is the narrator's last tribute to love, in which he elaborates on the impact and the working of love. The universal message of these verses is love's ubiquity and how love causes that the bitterness of life tastes agreeable and that the magical knot of life can be untied. It also justifies Majnūn's decisions, behaviour and the kind of love he practises.

4. *The romance's structure, metre and origin*

Like his other romances, Niẓāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn* starts *ab ovo*, and is prefaced by a long introduction. The poem is divided into 66 chapters and is couched in *mathnawī* form; it counts 4,559 distichs with the rhyme-scheme of aa, bb, cc, etc.⁷⁰ It is the most popular poetic form among the Persian poets for long epics, its equivalent in Arabic, the so-called *muzdawijj* has never become as popular as its Persian counterpart.⁷¹ *Mathnawī* offers the poet much freedom of expression since it is relatively free from prosodic rules, which govern the other poetical forms. From Firdausī's time up to the twentieth century, the *mathnawī* proved to be extremely popular and suitable for composing narrative poems in Persian.⁷²

or 'to act justly' is an attributive adjective of the arrow, it means here that the arrow goes right to the target. The relation between acting justly and the king is explicit.

⁷⁰ The edition I am referring to is that of A.A. Alizada, Moscow: Dānish, 1965. The number of chapters and lines differs in each edition. Thus Dastgirdī's version contains 66 chapters and 3,657 lines; he omits 1,007 couplets as interpolations. Tharwatiyān's version has 63 chapters and 4,553 verses, while the most recent editions of the poem edited by Barāt Zanjānī has 67 chapters and 4,583 verses.

⁷¹ J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, pp. 185-91; idem, in *EI*, under *Mathnawī*.

⁷² Even the modernist poet Nīmā, who experimented with new forms of poetry in the twentieth century, wrote his long narrative *Qal'a-yi siqrim* in *mathnawī* form.

The poem is written in the metre *hazaj-i musaddas-i akhrab-i maqbūd* - - o / o - o - / o - -. Opinions differ concerning the poet's choice of metre and some scholars discern certain significance in the poem's metre. Relying on Nizāmī's own opinion, Jan Rypka states that the poet feared the "subject would prove too slight; for this reason he chose the shortest metre."⁷³ J.E. Bertel's states that since Majnūn's love differed from that of Khusrau, one leading to rare poetry and the other to heroic deeds, Nizāmī used different metres in the two romances.⁷⁴ *Hazaj*, and its variations are sometimes considered to be the most popular metre for romances by scholars such as Šadr ad-Dīn Zamāniyān.⁷⁵ The idea that each specific metre suits a specific genre cannot be taken at face value, because before and after Nizāmī's time romances were written in *mutaqārib*, the marching and heroic metre of Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma*.⁷⁶ The reason that other poets used the same metre for romances is partly because many poets such as Amīr Khusrau, Jāmī and Maktabī imitated Nizāmī's poetics as well as his subject matter. Nizāmī comments on the metre in chapter five, when he refers to his indecision as how to write a poem on Majnūn's love. He uses the word *baḥr* meaning both 'sea' and 'metre':

I stood up to search for a jewel
I dug the mine and found elixir.
Nature appealed for a short way
for I was afraid of the long road.
There was no shorter way than this,
there was no quicker pretext to make on time.
It is a light *baḥr* but running,
its fishes are not dead but alive.
Many poems are composed with this flavour,
yet they do not possess the freshness of this poem.
No diver's mind can catch from this *baḥr*
a peerless pearl such as this;
Each of its couplets is like a strung pearl,
full of art and free from flaw.
(ll. 81-7)

⁷³ "Poets and Prose Writers" in *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 5, p. 581.

⁷⁴ J.E. Bertel's, *Nizāmī: Tvorcheskij put poeta*, Moskva: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1956, p. 151.

⁷⁵ See Š. Zamāniyān, *Barrīš-yi auzān-i shīr-i Fārsī*, Tehran: Bunyād-i Jānbāzān, 1374, pp. 137-46.

⁷⁶ 'Ayyūqī's *Warqa u Gulshāh*, Khājū Kirmānī's *Humā u Humāyūn* are both written in *mutaqārib*. For the relationship between metre and genre see J.T.P. de Bruijn's discussion in "The individuality of the Persian metre *khafif*" in *Arabic Prosody and its Applications in Muslim Poetry*, ed. B. Utas, Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, Transactions, Vol. 5, Uppsala, 1994, pp. 36-7.

The only reasons Nizāmī offers for his choice of the metre are that he feared he could not write a long poem and that another metre would not fit the subject-matter, which he initially thought to be too plain for the Iranian court.

Compared to Nizāmī's other romances, the textual organisation of Laylī and Majnūn is not very complicated. Prior to Nizāmī's era, the legend of Majnūn circulated in anecdotal forms. It was Nizāmī who threaded the scattered pearls of anecdotes about Majnūn's love and made a solid narrative of it. Nizāmī persianises the legend by adding certain Persian elements to it. Persian romances are almost always about royal personages, and people from other social ranks are simple and shadowy characters in the plot. As in a Persian romance, the narrator in *Laylī and Majnūn* portrays the lovers as royal personalities; he civilises the plot of this Bedouin legend to suit the taste and temperament of his Persian reader. Unlike the Arabic sources in which Majnūn meets Laylī in the desert amongst the camels, in Nizāmī's poem, he meets Laylī at school. Nizāmī integrates many anecdotes and several details of the Arabic legend into his romance. The scenes reported in Arabic sources include Majnūn's marriage proposal and his rejection by Laylī's father; his renunciation of the community of men; the complaint of Laylī's tribe to their chief which leads to the latter's order to kill Majnūn with impunity; Majnūn and his father's journey to the Ka'ba; the exchange of letters between the lovers; Laylī's marriage to Ibn Salām; Majnūn's releasing of gazelles; Majnūn's conversation with a raven; Majnūn's association with an old female beggar; meetings between Majnūn and his father; and the interference of the chivalrous chieftain Naufal.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Nizāmī's sources have been investigated by several scholars: J.E. Bertel's, *Nizāmī: Tvorcheskij*, pp. 147-48; Fuḍūlī, *Laylī and Majnūn by Fuzūlī*, with an introduction by A. Bombaci, pp. 47-63; I.J. Krackovskij, "Die Frühgeschichte der Erzählung von Macnun und Lailā in der Arabischen Literatur" in *Oriens*, trans. by H. Ritter, 8, 1955, pp. 1-50; M. 'Ishqpur, *Tahqīqī dar mathnawī-yi Laylī-u Majnūn*, pp. 28-35, 187-95; A. Kāmilnizhād, *Tahlīl-i āthār-i Nizāmī-yi Ganjawi*, Tehran: Bahman, 1369, pp. 31-4; A. Afsahzād, *Naqd wa barrisī-yi āthār wa sharh-i ahwāl-i Jāmī*, Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Mirāth-i Maktūb, 1378, pp. 592-96. In Ibn Qutayba' *Kitāb al-Shi'r*, the author refers to the following aspects of Majnūn: his madness (p. 563); Majnūn and cattle (p. 564); his poetic genius (p. 565); his association with wild beasts (p. 565); his nakedness (p. 565); his silence (p. 565); his friendship with Naufal (pp. 565-66); his visit to Ka'ba (p. 567); his coming to his senses at hearing Laylī's name (pp. 566-67); his rejection by Laylī's father (pp. 567-68); and his imprisonment at home (p. 570). See Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb ash-shi'r wash-shu'arā'*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr, Vol. 2, Cairo: Dār al-ma'ārif, 1966. Also Abū 'l-Faraj al-

As we shall see later in the present study, these episodes receive a rich and artistic treatment. A number of them, such as the Naufal episode develop into a completely different event, hardly resembling the original Arabic source.

Commenting on the Arabic sources, J.E. Bertel's concludes that there is no development or action in the story and the burst of passion is unsophisticated.⁷⁸ Bertel's identifies the following stages in the Arabic anecdotes when they are brought together: Majnūn's infatuation with Laylī; an unsuccessful marriage proposal; Majnūn's pilgrimage to Mecca; his wandering after he returns from Mecca; Naufal's intervention and Majnūn's condition after Naufal's failure; Majnūn's endeavour to see Laylī; his encounter with animals; Laylī's marriage; people who visit Majnūn to collect his poetry, and Majnūn's death. Nizāmī does not mention which sources he has used and it is not clear whether the poet ordered his chapters in this sequence; the order of the headings of the chapters differ in various manuscripts.⁷⁹ In Nizāmī's romance, the following episodes from the Arabic sources can be identified: Majnūn's father asks God for a child; Majnūn's falling in love; marriage proposal and refusal; his pilgrimage to Mecca; his wandering in the desert; meeting between father and son; Laylī's physical and mental description; Ibn Salām's proposal to Laylī's father; Majnūn's encounter with Naufal; Majnūn's definitive withdrawal from the community of men and his association with animals; Majnūn's encounter with an old woman; Laylī's imposed marriage; Majnūn's complaint to Laylī's phantasm (*khayāl*); meeting between Majnūn and his father; his father dies; Majnūn's bond with animals intensifies; Majnūn's supplication to the stars; exchange of letters between Laylī and Majnūn; Majnūn's meeting

Iṣfahānī devotes a long chapter to Majnūn in his *Kitāb al-aghānī*, Vol. 2, Cairo, Dār al-Kutub, 1346; al-Iṣfahānī's references to and anecdotes about Majnūn are too numerous to be briefly enumerated here and needs a separate study. For a list of anecdotes and reports about Majnūn see the index of this book under Majnūn Banī 'Āmir, pp. 474-75.

⁷⁸ J.E. Bertel's, *Izbrannye Trudy*, pp. 242-3; see also M.V. McDonald, who states somewhat radically that the Arabic legend "has no plot worth mentioning." "The Religious and Social Views of Nizami of Ganjeh" in *Iran, Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, Vol. 1, 1963, p. 99.

⁷⁹ See below 2.5, "The narrator's sources." As J.E. Bertel's has pointed out, the text of Nizāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn* was probably organised in the fourteenth century: this was the time when the manuscripts became numerous. See *Izbrannye Trudy*, p. 270.

with his maternal uncle; Majnūn meets his mother; his mother dies; Laylī sends a letter to Majnūn; Salām of Baghdād visits Majnūn; Majnūn's greatness; Zayd and Zaynab's love; Laylī's husband dies; Laylī and Majnūn unite; the lovers die; Zayd dreams of the lovers' union in Paradise.

Apart from these episodes from the sources, Nizāmī adds passages of his own. These comprise the motif of a childless king who desires an heir, preferably a son; Laylī's wandering in a spring-garden, her nightly supplication to God, her secret meetings with Majnūn, her conversation with her mother; the episode of Salām of Baghdād; the anecdote of a laughing partridge and an ant, the report of an ascetic in a cave; the account of the king of Marw and his dogs; the Zayd and Zaynab episode; Majnūn's supplication to the heavenly bodies and God; his kingship and his wise conversations with several characters. In addition, the rich portrayal of characters, the sublime and animating depictions of nature, time and settings, and numerous perspicacious comments are all the product of Nizāmī's imagination, his excellent poetic command of the language and his boundless erudition.

The episodes are not only charmingly told, they are coherently arranged so that there is a clear line of development and a dramatic climax to the plot. Since the Arabic sources are fragmentary, they do not have a line of development and climax. In Nizāmī's romance, following the episode in which the lovers fall in love with each other, the narrator tells of the rejection of Majnūn's marriage proposal by Laylī's father. The rejection is used as an incentive for Majnūn to abandon the community of men and to wander in the desert where he composes poetry about his unrequited love. It is also here that Naufal finds Majnūn and promises to unite the lovers. The narrator uses the opportunity of Naufal's meeting with Majnūn to tell long episodes about the war between Naufal and Laylī's tribe. The climax of the poem is reached when Naufal fails to fulfil his promise. Shedding tears, Majnūn seeks refuge in the desert once again. The narrator skilfully uses Majnūn's flight from men to show Majnūn's gradual renunciation of the material world and his affection towards animals. In two consecutive chapters, Majnūn divests himself of all his possessions in order to ransom trapped beasts from their hunters. In the following chapter, Majnūn reveals the state of his mind by talking to a black raven, and in the next he shows his utter submission by allowing an old woman to chain him. Through these

desert journeys of renunciation, his character develops increasingly into that of a mystic and a king. He converses with the stars and with God in the same way as a learned twelfth century Persian sage would do, and speaks to people in the same way as a mystic. His kingship is underscored with comparisons to mighty Perso-Islamic kings.

5. *The narrator's sources*

As mentioned earlier, it is not evident which sources Nizāmī has used for his romance. In seventeen different places in the poem, he refers to the existence of unidentified sources, ranging from a 'learned orator of Baghdad' to a *dihqān*, 'a village chief,' or 'a cultivator.' These references have the form of "x tells the story in this way" or "I heard from x that." For the sake of convenience, a full list of these references is provided here:

- 13:1 At the moment that he pierced the pearl of this tale,
the teller of this poem recounted thus.
- 26:1 The maker of the index of this garden's spread
has made a brand-mark on the thigh of speech in this way.
- 31:1 The treasurer of this treasure-house
lifts the top of the chest of treasure.
- 32:1 The musician who played this melody on the organ
sang in this way according to the musical mode.⁸⁰
- 36:1 The diver for the pearls of meaning
scattered the pearls from his lips.
- 37:1 The learned orator of Baghdad
imparted the news of the secret of speech thus.
- 38:1 The handmaid of the newly-wed bride
presented the bride [to her husband] on the couch in this way.
- 39:1 The eloquent *dihqān*, Persian-born recalls the condition of the
Arabs as follows.
- 43:1 The news-master, who invents tales,
reports on this story thus.
- 44:1 I have heard a story that once
there was a king in Marw.
- 49:1 In the golden diction, the moneychanger of speech
strung the gems thus.
- 54:1 The wise man of speech recollects in this way:

⁸⁰ The second hemistich can also be read as saying: "raises his voice from behind the curtain thus."

- 56:1 It is said that in those times there was
another madman⁸¹ who was oppressed.
58:1 The teller of this elegant tale,
whose bones were filled with marrow, said
62:1 The one who put his name to this fine manuscript wrote
upon a sheet of paper the following royal mandate,
63:1 The historian of amorous practice
reports from the writings of the Arabs,
64:1 The famous orator
ends the story in this way.

Any attempt to identify these sources must remain speculative. Nizāmī normally mentions his sources at the beginning of his poems. In *Makhzan al-asrār*, he refers to Ḥakīm Sanā'ī's *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa* as his source of inspiration. While in *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, the poet refers to Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma*, as his source, in *Sharaf-nāma* he points to various books from Jewish, Christian and Middle-Persian (*Pahlawī*) origins from which he gathers information. There are several possible reasons for Nizāmī's failure to identify his sources for *Laylī and Majnūn*. First, he may have gathered his information from oral transmitters. Various folklore versions of the tale could be the sources for a number of episodes in the poem, as J.E. Bertel's has noted.⁸² Secondly, the sources may well be imaginary, a device used to stress the foreign, ancient and popular character of the story for his Persian audience. In fact, A. Bombaci believes that the vagueness of the narrator's identity results into a "slightly fairy-tale atmosphere."⁸³ These references to supposed sources might also be allusions to the poet's own muse, who inspires him to write about specific themes. In addition, vague references to a source are a *topos* of the heroic epic Nizāmī has inherited from Firdausī.⁸⁴

Firdausī often identifies his source as a *dihqān*, as Nizāmī does at one point. The *dihqān* is a noble Persian, a country gentleman who is versed in history, especially the ancient culture and history of Iran.⁸⁵ One contemporary scholar of Nizāmī, B. Tharwatīyān, argues

⁸¹ Literally 'chain-breaker.'

⁸² J.E. Bertel's, *Nizāmī: Tvorcheskij put poeta*, p. 148.

⁸³ A. Bombaci in *Laylī and Majnūn by Fuzūlī*, p. 76.

⁸⁴ Compare J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, p. 189.

⁸⁵ See A. Tafazzoli in *Elr*, under *Dehqān* I; M. Zakeri, *Sasanian Soldiers in Early Muslim Society*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1993, pp. 43-4, also see the index of Technical Terms, under *Dihqān(ān)*. For a discussion on the oral aspect of Firdausī's sources see O.M. Davidson, *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings*, London: Cornell University Press, 1994, chapter 2 and 3, especially pp. 35-9.

that this *dihqān* is Nizāmī himself, without giving any explanation.⁸⁶ Such an identification is precarious, especially since it occurs in the poem only incidentally. After all, if one is going to identify Nizāmī with this *dihqān*, he can equally well be identified with the other sources mentioned above, which is unacceptable. The narrator does identify himself with Nizāmī a number of times, but in a direct fashion and never indirectly as in the above reference to the *dihqān*.

If Nizāmī's reference to the *dihqān* as a source is taken at face value, that is, that a *dihqān* really reported the story to him, it indicates the popularity of the legend of Majnūn in the Iranian world. Several references to the legend can be found in Persian literary works before Nizāmī. 'A.H. Zarrīnkūb does not exclude the possibility of a Persian source, yet he rightly maintains that the authority behind the source cannot be identified.⁸⁷ It would be more cautious to identify the sources Nizāmī alludes to with several different authorities, because several of the episodes can be traced back to simpler material in *Kitāb al-aghānī*, *Kitāb ash-shi'r*, and *Tazyīn al-aswāq*. We can also say that, by leaving the sources unidentified, the narrator adds an element of mystery and ancientness.

Furthermore, every time the unidentified sources are mentioned, this entails a transition from one narrative level to another, making the reader aware of the contrast between the worlds of reality and of fiction.⁸⁸ Such a transition also paves the way for the narrator to address a didactic point, to describe a setting or to change the topic. By reminding the reader that the episodes are delivered to him by wise authorities, the narrator gives authority to his didactic purpose.

6. *The prologue and epilogue*

The prologue and epilogue contain a large number of lines, a total of 810 couplets. These sections contain numerous comments from the narrator on a wide range of subjects. In the prologue, the narrator builds up a relationship between himself and the reader by disclosing his world-view and values, and by sharing personal experiences such as his relationship with his son, his deceased wife, and

⁸⁶ See his introduction to *Laylī u Majnūn*, p. 18.

⁸⁷ *Pir-i Ganja*, p. 117; *History of Iranian Literature*, ed. J. Rypka, et al., p. 211.

⁸⁸ For various narrative levels see Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative*, p. 93.

his adversaries. By offering this information, the narrator invites the reader to take the same position and to see the story from his point of view. Although the major writers of *mathnawī* poems before Nizāmī, such as Firdausī, Gurgānī, ‘Ayyūqī and Sanā’ī, provided a certain framework for the stories they recounted, the systematised structure used here was laid down by Nizāmī and was maintained by his imitators in subsequent centuries in a variety of languages. Nizāmī’s *Laylī and Majnūn* begins with a prayer on the Divine unity (*tauḥīd*) and is followed by chapters on the encomium on the Prophet (*na’t*), on the Prophet’s Night Journey (*mīrāj*), on wisdom and preaching, on the reason for the composition of the poem, on praise of the ruler and the prince, on poets who envy Nizāmī, on a response to the begrudging poets, on the poet’s advice to his son, on the poet’s own state and a reflection on the memories of deceased relatives.

Such a long introduction serves many purposes: explaining the reasons for the composition of the poem, exposing systematically the narrator’s beliefs, and above all giving interpretative hints to the reader. The narrator’s directions are not expressed in an imperious way; he smoothly creates a semi-mystical arena and places the actual story in the middle of it. It should be noted that although his prologues have a common structure, Nizāmī emphasises selected elements by elongation, ellipsis and juxtapositions, in accordance with the theme and nature of his tale. For instance, in *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, Nizāmī places the Prophet’s Night Journey towards the end of the poem and it is relatively short, but the Night Journey in *Laylī and Majnūn* is placed at the beginning and extends over 67 distichs. The longest Night Journey scene in Nizāmī’s *Khamṣa* occurs in *Haft paykar*, where it suggests the possibility of a mystical interpretation of this highly erotic poem. In all of these poems, one of the functions of the Prophet’s Night Journey scene is to show the reader how to develop his soul and attain perfection.

Many of the comments in the prologue appear at first sight to have little to do with the actual story, but on closer inspection it becomes clear that they are developed in one way or another in the story’s structure.⁸⁹ The first four chapters, comprising 309 couplets,

⁸⁹ Sir William Jones detected the distinct mystical elements in the poem from a reading of the prologue. Later he commented in his essay “On the Mystical poetry of the Persians and Hindus,” that Nizāmī’s romance is the most illuminating example for a mystical allegory: “The beautiful poem on the loves of *Laylī and Majnūn*

deal with spiritual themes. Chapters five to eleven consist of 356 couplets containing mainly didactic and biographical observations. Although chapter twelve (136 couplets) provides some significant pieces of biographical information, it is full of ethical and mystic motifs. In this particular chapter, which may be regarded as the earliest occurrence of the *sāqī-nāma* device in Nizāmī's *oeuvre*, the narrator dwells on various themes by communing with an imaginary cup-bearer (*sāqī*). He intersperses topics such as the licitness of wine in the religion of lovers; epitaphs on Nizāmī's father, mother and uncle; sorrow and solitude; life's transient nature; humility, etc. All these topics are further elaborated in the body of the romance, when the narrator speaks about the situation of a character. By alluding to certain aspects of his own life and later reflecting on them in the story, the narrator shows the strong relationship between the real and fictional worlds. Didactic lessons can be drawn from the experiences of both these worlds. The prologue presents us with the background views against which the narrator recounts his tale and interprets his own narrative.

Unlike the prologue, the epilogue is very concise and direct, totally 61 distichs. It contains counsels to Shirwānshāh and has little to do with the story. The subject-matter of the counsels is borrowed from the genre of the Mirror for Princes, seeking to instruct the king in perfect conduct in any situation. The topics include drinking wine, how to treat the enemy, war, the choice of friends, pardon, punishment, building the country, etc.⁹⁰ It is, in fact, inappropriate to call the concluding chapter an "epilogue" in the narrative sense, because in an epilogue, the narrator usually rounds off his story and makes sure that the reader has grasped the intended meaning.⁹¹ In Nizāmī's case, there is no connection between his concluding chapter and the preceding narrative, aside from the didacticism of both

by the inimitable Nizāmī is indisputably built on true history, yet avowedly allegorical and mysterious; for the introduction to it is a continued rapture on divine love; and the name of Laylī seems to be used in the *mathnauī* and the odes of Hāfiz for the omnipresent spirit of God." See "On the Mystical poetry of the Persians and Hindus" in *The Works of Sir William Jones*, Vol. 4, ed. Lord Teignmouth, Delhi: Agam Prakashan, 1977, p. 222. For Jones' translation of the tales from *Makhzan al-asrār* see idem, "Tales and Fables by Nizāmī," pp. 383-432.

⁹⁰ For a treatment of the drinking-bout, *majlis-i sharāb*, in medieval Persia see J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, pp. 156-60. For the subjects of the *Qābūs-nāma* see E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, p. 277.

⁹¹ See G. Prince, *A Dictionary*, under Epilogue.

and the fact that the themes overlap. The actual 'epilogue' occurs in the penultimate chapter, where the narrator assesses whether the purpose of his tale has been realised by recapitulating the essential elements of his philosophy of life. Here, a lover named Zayd dreams of Laylī and Majnūn who are in Paradise, accompanied by a heavenly old man (*pīr-i āsmānī*). The narrator reiterates his philosophy by having Zayd ask the names and condition of Majnūn and Laylī from this heavenly person. It is psychologically the most perfect setting to end the poem and to meditate upon it. The narrator attains the maximum effect by giving the last word to a spiritual dweller of Paradise:

What is the name of these cypress trees
that hold cups in their hands in the garden of Iram?
How did they, who have flown to the station (*manzil*)
of the soul, achieve this dignity (*manzilat*)?
(ll. 28-9)

The man answers:

These two lovers who have become one
are each other's eternal friends.
That one is the king of the world because of his playing right (*rāst-bāzī*)
and the other is the moon of idols because she caresses the hearts.
This one who is the moon is Laylī resembling the night;
the other who is the king is nicknamed Majnūn.
They were two unpierced rubies
who were in love in the breast of fidelity.
They have not seen any peace in the world,
and have not satisfied their desire there.
Here they will see no more pain,
to the end of eternity they will thus remain.
He who does not consume things in that [earthly] world,
will be elevated in this way in this [heavenly] world.
He who is sorrowful in that other world,
will be delighted in this way in this world.
(ll. 31-8)

The response of the heavenly man summarises the whole philosophy of the narrator: the terrestrial world is a place of suffering, desperation and sorrow. Men are secure in this world only if they take refuge in the heart of love and fidelity. Even in such a sanctuary, man should not fulfil his desire because any passing worldly pleasure can harm the everlasting pleasure in the celestial world. The

more man suffers, grieves and disciplines his lower soul in this world, the more he will find enjoyments in the world hereafter.

To conclude, Nizāmī's life and work reveal his predilection for writing love stories that incorporate a series of linked themes. Didactic, ascetic and gnostic elements appear together in his romances. The poet subtly introduces new themes, exhibiting something of his reclusive lifestyle, gnostic faith and his love for romantic and erotic narratives. Nizāmī couches his narratives in a highly refined, courteous and double-edged language, usually offering extra dimensions to the plot. His metaphors are immediately arresting and leave an impression on the reader. When he uses rhetorical devices, he does not merely apply them as an embellishment, but he rather aims to gain utmost effect in his narrative.

We have demonstrated that the narrator's stance in Nizāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn* is intrusive. He has free access to the characters' feelings and minds but does not reveal the feelings of all characters; his main attention is focused on Laylī and Majnūn. Another notable feature is the large volume of commentary from the narrator: the narrator's main purpose in telling the story is to make didactic statements about various aspects of life, love and death. The statements should not be considered as ponderous pedantic pieces: they are extremely practical and effective to the Persian reader. Unlike the literary tradition in the West, in which moralistic passages in a story are often taken as a disturbing element, to a medieval Persian audience, these portions show the wisdom of the author and above all they highlight the purpose of the story. As we have demonstrated, Nizāmī is profound and novel as far as the style, language and organisation of his romance are concerned. Finally, we have also shown that in writing *Laylī and Majnūn*, although Nizāmī exploits many Arabic anecdotes, he adds a large number of episodes contrived by himself. It is indeed by a neat organisation of these materials and a rare poetic gift that he wrote the first romance about Majnūn's love.

CHAPTER THREE

CHARACTERS AND LOVERS

1. *Characters in 'Udhrite love poetry*

Nizāmi's *Laylā and Majnūn* is an 'Udhrite romance and differs considerably from his other romances. 'Udhrite love and characters have certain features, which need to be briefly studied first. 'Udhri is the *nisba* of the small Arabic tribe of Bānū 'Udhra, from the Hijāz area. The poets who wrote in 'Udhrite style contributed to Islamic literatures mainly through their compositions on the themes of women and love.¹ 'Udhrite love (*al-ḥubb al-'Udhri*) is a literary and philosophical theme, inspired by Platonic love.² The prototype of 'Udhrite love poetry and stories goes back to pre-Islamic times, with poets such as al-Muraqqash al-Akbar, 'Auf b. Sa'd and al-Muraqqash al-Aṣghar Rabī'a b. Sufyān.³ Although Islam influenced 'Udhrite love poetry, the themes, motifs and images of the pre-Islamic (*Jāhiliyya*) period were largely preserved.⁴ 'Udhrite poets used religious phraseology and allusions to idealise the female beloved. However the

¹ S. Enderwitz, *Liebe als Beruf*, see the index, under 'Udhriten and Ḥubb 'Udhri; E. Wagner, *Grundzüge der Klassischen arabischen Dichtung*, 2, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988, pp. 68-77; J. Sattārī, *Sīmā-yi zan dar farhang-i Irān*, Tehran: Sa'di, 1375, pp. 144-67; idem, *Hālāt*, pp. 191-230; A. Miquel & P. Kemp, *Majnūn et Laylā*, Paris: Sindbad, 1984, pp. 15-17, 37-8; A. Kāmilnizhād, *Tahṭil-i āthār*, pp. 31-5; T. Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung*, pp. 47-52, see also the index under 'Udhritische Liebe; J.C. Bürgel, "Love, Lust, and Longing: Eroticism in Early Islam as Reflected in Literary Sources," in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, Malibu, California: Udena Publications, 1979, pp. 91-6; R. Jacobi, in *EI*, under 'Udhri; J. Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: the Poetics of Nostalgia in Classical Arabic Nasib*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp. 115-16.

² For the influence of 'Udhritism on the concept of courtly love in medieval Europe, see Louis Massignon in *Enzyklopaedie des Islam*, under 'Udhri; J.C. Vadet, *L'esprit courtois*, Introduction.

³ S.K. Jayyusi, "Umayyad Poetry" in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A.F.L. Beeston et al., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 421.

⁴ For the influence of Islam on the 'Udhritism see A.M. Zubaidi, "The Impact of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth on Medieval Arabic Literature" in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A.F.L. Beeston et al., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 325.

Islamic influence should not be overestimated, because there are few Koranic references in this type of poetry. The use of religious vocabulary became increasingly marked with the emergence of Sufism, which borrowed several elements from 'Udhism. The character-traits of the 'Udhrite lover, such as chastity, humble devotion, isolation, love-madness and martyrdom, were regarded by Sufis as praiseworthy qualities inevitably associated with their pure love for the divine beloved. Not only did mystics utilise short anecdotes about 'Udhrite lovers, particularly Laylī and Majnūn, to show their own relationship to the Beloved, they also took over erotic elements to be found in 'Udhrite poetry. From the beginning of the twelfth century, mystics employed increasingly erotic vocabulary to describe their love towards the Divine.

'Udhrite love poetry reached its zenith during the reign of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750), when numerous poet-lovers eternalised their tragic love. One of the earliest 'Udhrite love poets, 'Urwa b. Ḥizām, who was smitten with the love of his cousin 'Afrā', put his feelings of unrequited love into verse. His love story has been taken as a pattern by other 'Udhrite poet-lovers. The story has been versified by the Persian poet 'Ayyūqī in his *Warqa and Gulshāh*.⁵ Among the most famous poets of this tradition are Jamīl b. 'Abdullāh b. Ma'mar, who bewailed his unattainable love for Buthayna;⁶ Kuthayyir b. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Khuzā'ī who sang of 'Azza; Qays b. Mulawwah, nicknamed Majnūn Laylā, and Qays b. Dharīḥ and his Lubnā.

Generally speaking, the plots of 'Udhrite stories revolve around the lover's unrequited love. The lovers are stock characters: they do not develop and could easily be interchanged with characters from other 'Udhrite romances. The lover falls in love at a very young age with his cousin or with a maiden from a different tribe. The girl's father refuses to give his daughter's hand, and marries her off to another man. The chief of the tribe prohibits the lover on pain of death from entering the area of his daughter's settlement. This

⁵ See Dh.A. Ṣafā's introduction to the poem; idem, "Comparisons des origines et des sources des deux contes persans: Leyli et Madjnoun de Nizāmī et Warqa et Gulshāh de 'Ayyūqī" in *Colloquio sul poeta persiano*, Rome: 1977, pp. 137–47; also see DJ. Khaleghi-Motlagh in *ELr*, under 'Ayyūqī; François de Blois in *ELr*, under Epic.

⁶ For an analysis of this story see F. Gabrieli, "Gamīl al-'Udrī. Studio Critico e raccolta dei frammenti" in *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 17, 1937, 40–71, pp. 133–172.

marks the beginning of an extreme and perpetual suffering and affliction for the lover. He remains chaste all his life and bemoans his sad life. Made distraught by unrequited love, he roams the deserts and mountains in nakedness, living in isolation in caves and singing love poems for his beloved. Even when the two lovers chance to meet secretly, they often satisfy their desire either by singing poetry at a distance, or by shedding tears. They may fall into a swoon when they encounter each other. M. Gerhardt observes that the 'Udhrite lover exemplifies the heroism, not of action, but of sentiment.'⁷ He is known by his tears, emaciation and utter submissiveness to the beloved. For the lover, to love means to sing love poems, to send love letters and to meditate on the idea of the beloved. His only desire is to look at the beloved's face and to speak to her; any physical contact is seen as an unchaste act.

The female beloved is portrayed as acquiescent, usually playing a passive role. Her acts of volition are within the limits of certain codes in force in her community. In many cases the stern code of honour, which is associated with the reputation of the girl and her tribe, has a higher place than love itself. In many of the 'Udhrite stories, the beloved remains chaste and virgin, despite the fact that she is married off to another man. In this way, she creates a balance between her personal love and tribal honour, whereas her tribe prefer honour to love. In spite of her divided loyalty to her lover and her tribe, she succeeds in satisfying the lover as well as her own tribe. Because of this quality of the beloved, she is often elevated to the level of transcendence and becomes the ideal of womanhood. Paradoxically, as the poet-lover elevates the character of the beloved to a spiritual level, his yearning for her intensifies. As she is taken further from his grasp, partly due to the lover's own idealisation of her, the lover becomes madder. The lover and beloved show deference to each other. Where the two are from different tribes, their tribes intervene in the love affair, often leading to a bloody war, and destroying the lover's hope for union with the beloved.

The language used by the characters in 'Udhrite poetry is devotional, simple and transparent. The lover's speech is, in the first place, a medium to express his intense emotional agony and psychological state rather than to recount his actual story. He prays to

⁷ M.I. Gerhardt, *The Art of Story-Telling*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963, p. 129.

God to increase his love rather than seeking to be released from his suffering. His poems are chiefly about unattainable union, ill fate, the shortcomings of mankind, and the pangs of separation. In fact, separation is often preferred to union in 'Udhrite poetry. A. Hamori refers to a line from Jamīl's *Dīwān*, which was regarded by some medieval literati as the "most perfect verse of *ghazal* ever uttered by an Arab." The line runs as follows: "My ardour dies when we meet and revives when we part."⁸ Separation, suffering and death were indispensable parts of 'Udhrite love, so that the tribe gained a great reputation as "a people who, when they love, die."⁹ The lover sings a love that is ordained in pre-eternity (*azal*) and lasts to post-eternity (*abad*).¹⁰ To show the eternal nature of such a love, a friend usually dreams of the lovers' joyful union in the gardens of Paradise.

The stories about the various pairs of famous lovers in the 'Udhrite tradition are predominantly anecdotal. The characters are semi-historical, but historicity and their identity is of secondary importance. The focus is on their fate, suffering, intense love and constancy. In many anecdotes, the 'Udhrite lover is put on a par with wise men, poets and ascetics. The lover is held in high esteem by the people, even when he is driven mad by love, and they communicate their compassion to him. The pair are often treated with indulgence. The actual subject matter of the story focuses on the depiction of the lover's high tension of feelings, emotions and thoughts. When the lover finally dies of grief, he is considered a martyr and his tomb usually becomes a place of pilgrimage.

The lover in Persian romances, on the other hand, is almost always a prince. The Persian prince undertakes the most courageous and resourceful deeds, contrives the most intricate tricks and embarks on a perilous journey to far off countries to unite himself with the object of his love, whereas the 'Udhrite lover, acquiesces to fate, withdraws, composing poetry and singing sorrowful songs to relieve his heart. In 'Udhrite romances, love strikes at the first meeting, whereas in

⁸ A. Hamori, "Love Poetry (*Ghazal*) in 'Abbasid Belles-lettres, ed. J. Ashtiany et al., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 205.

⁹ S.K. Jayyusi, "Umayyad Poetry" in *Arabic Literature*, p. 425.

¹⁰ See *Murūj adh-Dhahab*, Vol. 2, Pers. Trans., p. 375, in which the famous 'Udhrite poet Jamīl sings about his beloved Buthayna: "Before we were conceived (. . .), my soul loved hers, and as we grew, so did the love of our souls for each other. If we die, our love will not stop; our love will last forever, even in the darkness of the grave, love will come to us."

the majority of Persian stories the lover hears, dreams or sees the portrait of the beloved and falls in love with her.¹¹ Unlike the 'Udhrite lover, who is the archetype of chastity, the Persian lover is unfaithful: he gratifies his passion with other maidens several times before he achieves union with the girl he loves most. What is more, the sensual and detailed description of a love-making scene, which is characteristic of the Persian romances, is totally missing in 'Udhrite stories.¹² The 'Udhrite stories are more about the psychology of the lovers, whereas action is a fundamental element in Persian romances. The character of the Persian lover develops through his adventures, while the character of his 'Udhrite counterpart grows through his voluntary isolation. The 'Udhrite lover often marries a woman from his own or a neighbouring tribe, whereas the Persian lover marries a princess from a far off country, and sometimes from a different race. For instance, in folklore, the lover often goes on a journey to marry the daughter of the king of the fairies (*dukhtar-i shāh-i parīyān*).¹³ In *Qābūs-nāma*, Kay Kāwūs advises his son to marry a maiden from a different tribe "in order to make one's own tribe two and to make a friend of a stranger."¹⁴ Unlike the 'Udhrite lover, who dies in separation, the Persian prince finds union with his beloved and finally marries her, living happily ever after. It was perhaps under the influence of 'Udhism that Nizāmī's other two romances do not have a happy ending. In *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, Shīrūya kills his own father Khusrau, and then asks Shīrīn to marry him. Shīrīn tricks him and commits suicide at Khusrau's grave. In *Haft-paykar*, after his erotic adventures, Bahrām Gūr, the hero of the romance, disappears mysteriously in a cave.

¹¹ For such cases see *Zāl and Rūdāba*, *Rustam and Tahmina*, *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, *Haft-paykar*, *Gul and Naurūz*, Wahshī Bāfiqī's *Farhād and Shīrīn*, Jamālī's *Mihr and Māh*, *Shaykh San'ān and the Christian beauty*. In later writings on love, specific chapters are devoted to the way of falling in love. Amīr Ḥusaynī Harawī devotes two chapters to "Falling in love by [hearing] the news" and "Falling in love by sight." See *Mathnawīhā-yi 'irfānī-yi Amīr Ḥusaynī Harawī*, ed. S.M. Turābī, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tehran, 1371, pp. 147-151. For falling in love through seeing the portrait of the future beloved see J.C. Bürgel, *The Feather of Simurgh*, ch. 5, "Love on Sight of Pictures"; Ḥ. Dhulfaqrī, *Manzūmahā-yi 'āshiqāna-yi adab-i Fārsī*, Tehran: Nīmā, 1374, pp. 26-7.

¹² For specimens of these scenes see Dj. Khaleghi Motlagh, "Tan-kāma-sarā'ī dar adab-i Fārsī" in *Irānshināsī*, Vol. 8, 1375, pp. 15-54.

¹³ Instances can be found in *Samak 'Ayyār* and in other medieval popular romances.

¹⁴ *Qābūs-nāma*, p. 136.

The character of the female beloved in Persian romances differs substantially from the 'Udhrite beloved. The Persian beloved is almost always of royal descent. She is portrayed as a warrior-princess, who takes action and fights for her goal. Generally speaking, she has the freedom to choose her marriage partner and she often takes the initiative to do so.¹⁵ Kay Kāwūs, for example, tells the story of Shahr-Bānū, the daughter of the last Sasanian king, who was taken by the Arabs as a prisoner of war. In this story, Shahr-Bānū selects her own partner and avoids accepting the candidates introduced to her.¹⁶ The Persian beloved takes part in festivities (*bazm*), in war (*razm*), in hunting (*shikār*), in polo-play (*chaugān-bāzī*) and in other royal activities. Sometimes, she disguises her gender by appearing in man's dress. She is like the 'Udhrite beloved in that they are both idealised by the lover, but where the 'Udhrite beloved attains an elevated position towards the end of the story, in Persian romances the beloved's supernatural aspects are mentioned at the beginning: her supernatural traits are the catalyst for the lover's quest for union. In both traditions, the female beloveds are idealised figures, symbols of chastity, loyalty, beauty and wisdom.¹⁷

Given the contrast between the characters in 'Udhrite and Persian romances, it is not surprising that modern Persian scholars have been quite sceptical about the characters of the 'Udhrite lovers. Prominent scholars such as Dh. Šafā, 'A.H. Zarrīnkūb and 'A.A. Sa'īdī Sīrjānī have disparaged the 'Udhrite stories. Their criticism is against the story's sad ending, preference of honour to love, the severe tribal laws imposed on the lovers, and especially on the female beloved, social ostracism and the barren setting of the story.¹⁸ Despite such negative appraisals, which have been followed by other scholars, the 'Udhrite romances are actually more popular than indigenous Persian romances such as *Bizhan and Manizha*, *Ẓāl and Rūdāba* and even *Khusrau and Shīrīn*. In his statistical survey of a number of Persian romances, Ḥasan Dhulfaqārī enumerates 59 'imitations' (*naẓīras*) of

¹⁵ See, for instance, Shīrīn, in Niẓāmī's *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, and Tahmīna and Manizha in Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma*.

¹⁶ *Qābūs-nāma*, p. 137.

¹⁷ Mia Gerhardt has reached the same conclusion from an analysis of the distinctive characteristics of Persian and Arabic love-stories in the *Thousand and One Nights*. See *The Art of Story-Telling*, chapter 4.

¹⁸ See Dh.A. Šafā's introduction to 'Ayyūqī's *Warqa and Gulshāh*, pp. 14–15; 'A.H. Zarrīnkūb, *Pir-i Ganja*, p. 123; Sa'īdī Sīrjānī, *Simā*, p. 11.

Laylī and Majnūn as the most popular romance in the Iranian world, followed by 51 versions of *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, 22 variants of *Yūsuf and Zulaikha* and 16 versions of *Wāmiq and 'Adhrā'*.¹⁹ It is worth adding here that S. Asadollayev names 80 poets who have written versions of *Laylī and Majnūn*.²⁰

2. The character of Majnūn prior to Nizāmī's era

The tale of the ill-starred lover Majnūn has been used frequently from the ninth century in both mystical and profane literature.²¹ Mystics and poets regarded Majnūn's love as an example of perfect love, referring to specific aspects of his character such as his constancy, love-madness, wandering the desert, weeping, etc. The legend of Majnūn became the most popular topic in Sufism, but the course of this development has not been adequately studied.²²

The poetic references to Majnūn before Nizāmī's time are comparatively limited. The number of references increases significantly after Nizāmī wrote his poem. The same is true of other pairs of

¹⁹ See H. Dhulfaqārī, *Manzūmahā-yi 'āshiqāna*, pp. 66–87. The other romances named by Dhulfaqārī include *Hir and Rānjhā* (13), *Sulaymān and Bilqīs* (9), *Mahmūd and Ayāz* (7), *Ratn and Padūmāt* (7), *Madhūmālt and Manūfar* (5). See also J.E. Bertel's, *Izbrannye Trudy*, pp. 275–313 in which the author names 20 Persian, one Turkish Chaghatay, 3 Azarī, 14 Ottoman Turkish and one Kurdish version of Nizāmī's poem. For another comparison of *nazīra* on *Laylī and Majnūn* see 'A.A. Dihkhudā, *Lughat-nāma*, under Laylā Bint Sa'd b. Rabī'a. Dihkhudā enumerates 51 versions, 13 of which are written in Turkish. See also M.J. Mahjūb, "Laylī-u Majnūn-i Nizāmī wa Majnūn-u Laylī-yi Amīr Khusrau" in *Sukhan*, 1342, No. 6, pp. 620–37; for *Khusrau and Shīrīn* imitations see Ṭal'at Baṣārī, *Chihra-yi Shīrīn*, Tehran: Māz, 1350, pp. 16–19; H. Mu'ayyad, "Muqallidān-i Khusrau-u Shīrīn-i Nizāmī" in *Irānshināsī*, Vol. V, No. 1, Spring 1993, pp. 72–88; A. Rādfar, *Kitāb-shināsī*, pp. 377–430; J. Sattārī, *Hālāt*, pp. 9–10. Concerning the romance of *Wāmiq and 'Adhrā'*, A. Shahriyārī mentions 18 versions in his introduction to Mīrzā Ibrāhīm Kirmānī, *Wāmiq u 'Adhrā'*, Mashhad: Jāwidān Khirad, 1370, pp. 22–7; see also Maulawī Muḥammad Shafī's comprehensive introduction in his *Wāmiq-o-Adhrā of 'Unṣurī*, Lahore: The Panjab University Press, 1967.

²⁰ S. Asadollayev, *'Laylī i Majnūn' v Fārsī Yazychnoi Literature (bibliograficheskiy obzor)*, Dushanba: Izdatelstvo Donish, 1981.

²¹ See I.J. Krackovskij's article translated by H. Ritter, "Die Frühgeschichte der Erzählung von Macnūn und Lailā in der Arabischen Literatur" in *Oriens*, 8, 1955, pp. 24–41; J.T.P. de Bruijn in *El*, under *Madjūn*: 2. In Persian, Kurdish and Pashto literature.

²² Jalāl Sattārī devotes a chapter to how mystics use anecdotes about Laylī and Majnūn in their writings. See J. Sattārī, *Hālāt*, chapter 14.

lovers, such as *Khusrau and Shirin*, and *Farhād and Shirin*, characters who owe their celebrity to Nizāmī. In the pre-Nizāmī period, the stories of these lovers are found alongside other pairs such as the Iranian *Wīs and Rāmīn*, and *Bizhan and Manizha*, the Greek *Wāmiq and Adhrā*, and the homosexual love between Sulṭān Maḥmūd and his slave boy Ayāz.

One of the first poetic allusions to Majnūn is attributed to the tenth-century poet Rūdakī, who remarks that only lovers can feel each other's state:

Those who possess the attributes of Laylī are not aware of our state;
a mad lover (*majnūn*) knows what the state of Majnūn is.²³

A contemporary of Rūdakī, the poetess Rābi'a b. Kalb Quzdārī, refers in one of her *ghazals* to Laylī and Majnūn. Here, the roses assume the colour of Laylī's blushing cheeks while Majnūn's eyes are behind the raining clouds:

Are Majnūn's eyes behind the cloud
that the roses assume the colour of Laylī's cheeks?²⁴

Manūchihrī (d. ca. 432/1040–1) refers to Laylī and Majnūn at least three times. Using the poetic figure of 'combination and division' (*jam' wa taqsim*), he compares Majnūn's tears to a raining cloud and Laylī's laughter to lightning: "The cloud weeps meaningfully, the lightning laughs without meaning," the former is "like the lashes of Majnūn," the latter "like the lips of Laylī."²⁵ The eleventh-century mystic, Bābā Ṭāhir of Hamadān, refers to the lovers to illustrate the importance of mutual love:

How sweet is love when it is mutual,
for one-sided love is all pain of the brain.
Although Majnūn had a distraught heart,
Laylī's heart was more distraught than his.²⁶

²³ Rūdakī, *Dīwān*, ed. M. Dānishpazhūh, Tehran: Tūs, 1374, p. 45. Rūdakī refers to Laylī and Majnūn several times, see pp. 33, 82. The last reference is also attributed to the poet Qatrān of Tabrīz.

²⁴ See Dh.A. Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-i adabiyāt dar Irān*, Tehran: Firdaus, 1368, Vol. 1, p. 451; for more information on this poetess see A. Idārachī Gilānī, *Shā'irān-i ham'asr-i Rūdakī*, Tehran: Adabī wa Tārīkhī, 1370, pp. 83–94.

²⁵ Manūchihrī, *Dīwān*, ed. S.M. Dabīrsiyāqī, Tehran: Zawwār, 1375, p. 123, *qaṣīda* 64, l. 1668. Manūchihrī's other references occur on p. 132, *qaṣīda*, 68, l. 1781; another reference is made to Qays as a poet on page 145, *qaṣīda* 74, l. 1979.

²⁶ See *Bābā Ṭāhir-nāma*, ed. P. Adhkā'ī, Tehran: Tūs, 1375, p. 270. Bābā Ṭāhir compares himself to Majnūn twice in two separate quatrains, see pp. 269, 280.

In the quatrains attributed to the great mystic Abū Saʿīd, there are two references to Laylī and Majnūn as a pair, and seven references to Majnūn.²⁷ It is not clear, however, whether he means by *majnūn* specifically the legendary Majnūn or simply a madman in the mystical sense of the word. In any case, there is an allusion to Majnūn. In the following quatrain, the poet depicts how his heart grows into a madman:

The heart that you saw turned into blood for sorrow, and has gone;
it departed through the eye filled with blood and has gone.
One day, as it traversed the air of love, it saw one
like unto Laylī. The heart turned into Majnūn, and was gone.²⁸

In another quatrain, Abū Saʿīd lists the changing states of love, and also how love manifests itself in one pair of lovers after another:

Sometimes you are the coiffeur of Laylī's locks;
sometimes you are all melancholy in the head of Majnūn;
Sometimes you become the mirror for Yūsuf's beauty;
sometimes you turn into the fire of Zulaykhā's harvest.²⁹

Fakhr ad-Dīn Gurgānī refers twice to Laylī and Majnūn in *Wīs and Rāmīn* (written ca. 1054). In his first reference, the poet compares the beauty of a vernal garden to Laylī's face. Gurgānī's other reference occurs in chapter 82, in which Rāmīn reproaches his own heart and blames it for falling in love with Gul.³⁰ Here he compares his loneliness to Majnūn.³¹

The Ismāʿīlī propagandist, Nāṣir Khusrau refers to the lovers several times. In his *Safar-nāma*, or traveller's tale, in the section dealing with his return from Mecca, he mentions a ruined place in the area of Ṭāʾif, which people say was once Laylī's house. The remarks only that "Their story is wondrous."³²

In his *Dīwān*, Nāṣir Khusrau (d. ca. 465-70/1072-77) objects to Majnūn's masochistic love, advising his reader not to follow his example:

²⁷ *Sukhanān-i manẓūm-i Abū Saʿīd Abū ʿl-Khayr*, ed. S. Nafīsī, Tehran: Haydarī, 1334, p. 6, q. 36; p. 23, q. 158; p. 32, q. 222; p. 64, q. 436; p. 69, q. 476; p. 84, q. 576; p. 95, q. 645.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23, q. 158.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 95, q. 645.

³⁰ *Wīs u Rāmīn*, p. 219, l. 19.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 293, l. 6.

³² *Safar-nāma-yi Nāṣir Khusrau*, ed. N. Wazīnpūr, Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, eighth edition, 1370, p. 101.

You have seen the qualities and functions of the angel
so that you may not follow the example of Laylī and Majnūn.³³

Other poets, such as Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmān (d. ca. 525/1131) and Amīr Mu'izzī (d. ca. 542/1147) have also alluded to these lovers. Like Quzdārī's and Manūchihri's allusions, Mu'izzī's references are connected to nature. He often compares Laylī's beauty to the spring and Majnūn's feelings to the hot summer and his eyes to a raining cloud:

the garden laughs like the face of Laylī in the spring,
the cloud weeps like Majnūn's eyes in the winter.³⁴

Salmān compares his own life to that of Majnūn twice.³⁵ Also Anwarī (d. ca. 565/1169–70) makes three references to Laylī and Majnūn, all relating to Laylī's beauty.³⁶ In his four references to Majnūn, Khāqānī of Shirwān (d. 545/1199) either decries the material world through the example of Majnūn or compares Majnūn's agonising state to a harp complaining.³⁷

From the end of the twelfth century, the legend of Majnūn became exceptionally popular. His name, and anecdotes from his life, occur frequently in mystical contexts. This increasing popularity relates to several developments in Persian literature. First of all, *ghazal* poetry developed from the beginning of the twelfth century and became a medium of expression for both mystical and profane love. Poets increasingly employed mystical and erotic vocabulary to describe transcendental love. The fusion between secular love and mysticism became so profound that, as J.T.P. de Bruijn has put it, "The decision whether a given poem should be called a Sufi *ghazal* or a profane love song very often does not depend so much on the poem itself, but on what we know about the author."³⁸ This is equally true

³³ Nāṣir Khusrau, *Dīwān*, ed. M. Mīnuwī & 'A.A. Dihkhudā, Tehran: Mahdī, 1372, pp. 355, 455.

³⁴ Mu'izzī makes nine references to these lovers. See *Dīwān*, ed. 'A. Iqbāl, Tehran: Islāmiyya, 1318, pp. 18, 30, 157, 499, 558, 631, 722, 727, 732.

³⁵ Mas'ūd Sa'd-i Salmān, *Dīwān*, ed. R. Yāsami, Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1362, pp. 197, 395.

³⁶ Anwarī, *Dīwān*, ed. M.T. Mudarris Raḍawī, Tehran: 'Ilmī, 1372, Vol. I, pp. 1, 345, 373.

³⁷ Khāqānī-yi Shirwānī, *Dīwān*, ed. Sajjādī, Tehran: Zawwār, 1357, pp. 144, 476; other references are made on pp. 169 and 469.

³⁸ J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, p. 55; see also idem, "The Religious Use of Persian Poetry" in *Studies on Islam*, Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Company,

of poetic references to Majnūn in this period. The prominent *ghazal* writer of the twelfth century, Sanā'ī, often presents Majnūn as a mystical lover. Sanā'ī refers to Majnūn ten times in his *Dīwān* and recounts one anecdote about him in his *Ḥadiqa*.³⁹ The mystic poet Farīd ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (d. ca. 618/1221) refers no more than three times to Majnūn in his *Dīwān*, but recounts a total of 25 anecdotes in his three most popular works, the *Ilāhī-nāma*, *Muṣibat-nāma*, and *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*.⁴⁰ In addition, poets tended to attach any extreme incident originally referring to other 'Udhrite lovers to Majnūn and Laylī. In this way, many anecdotes entered the Persian literary tradition under Majnūn's name. Perhaps the most striking example is a story in which a king summons Majnūn to his court and asks him about Laylī's beauty. This belongs probably to the 'Udhrite lovers, Buthayna and Jamīl, at the court of 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān. 'Aṭṭār, Sa'dī and Rūmī all recount this story in their works, with the names changed to Majnūn and Laylī.⁴¹

The twelfth century also saw the appearance of influential treatises on the mystical theory of love. The authors usually cited episodes about Majnūn's love to illustrate a technical Sufi concept. For mystics, Majnūn was an example of a selfless lover. Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) relates the following account to demonstrate Majnūn's position among the Sufis: "Someone dreamt of Majnūn and asked him: 'How did God treat you?' Majnūn said: 'He pardoned me and made me the argument for the lovers.'"⁴² Mystics were particularly attracted to the way Majnūn lost himself in contemplating the beloved. They regarded

1974, pp. 35-43; idem, "Sanā'ī and the Rise of Persian Mystical Poetry" in *La signification*, Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1978, pp. 35-43.

³⁹ See Sanā'ī, *Dīwān*, pp. 41, 224, 495, 834, 835, 854, 873, 904, 964, 1129; *Ḥadiqa al-haqīqa wa shari'at al-ṭariqa*, ed. M.T. Mudarris Raḍawī, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tehran, 1368, pp. 457-58, in which the poet relates the story of Majnūn and the gazelle.

⁴⁰ The anecdotes occur in the following works: *Ilāhī-nāma*, pp. 71, 108, 122-23, 135, 226-27, 239-40, 299-300, 328-29, 360-61; *Muṣibat-nāma*, pp. 69, 69-70, 101, 135, 138-39, 198-99, 249, 273, 275-76, 279-80, 291, 352; *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, pp. 183, 188-89, 232. It may well be that 'Aṭṭār knew Nizāmī's poem, because several of his anecdotes resemble episodes from Nizāmī's romance. In fact, there are scholars who are convinced that 'Aṭṭār based several of his stories on Nizāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn*. See, for instance, M. Wāhiddūst, "Ta'thīr-padhīrī-yi Ilāhī-nāma az Laylī u Majnūn" in *Sāya dar Khurshīd*, Tehran: Āyāt, 1374, Vol. 2, pp. 521-535, in which the author compares 'Aṭṭār's Rābi'a and Biktāsh to Nizāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn*.

⁴¹ See *infra*, chapter 11:2, p. 218.

⁴² *Tarjuma-yi risāla-yi Qushayriyya*, p. 562.

him as a perfect example of 'annihilation' (*fanā*) in the Beloved. Majnūn's saying: "I am Laylī and Laylī is I" which reflects the oft-quoted phrase of Ḥallāj: "I am he whom I love; whom I love is I" occurs quite frequently in mystical writings.⁴³ Aḥmad Ghazālī uses two anecdotes in his *Sawānīh*.⁴⁴ Several commentaries on this short treatise have used at least one anecdote about Majnūn.⁴⁵ The references to Majnūn in these commentaries are limited to short phrases and anecdotes to illustrate mystical concepts.

Being an "epoch-making poem," Nizāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn* changed the image of Majnūn decisively.⁴⁶ It was followed by numerous imitations in various languages throughout the extensive region in which Persian was spoken or cultivated as a court or literary language. There were also an increasing number of references to Majnūn in lyrical poetry. For example, Khājū Kirmānī alludes to Laylī and Majnūn 52 times in his *Dīwān*, whereas no poet before Nizāmī's time refers to Majnūn and Laylī more than 10 times.⁴⁷ Sa'dī has 36 references in his *Dīwān*, and Rūmī mentions the lovers 106 times in his *Dīwān*.⁴⁸ Each of these poets also includes anecdotes about Majnūn in their other works.⁴⁹

3. Nizāmī's Majnūn

The characters in Nizāmī's romances appear in continual succession, representing people from various walks of life. There are 34 characters in the romance, excluding the flora and fauna, clouds and the

⁴³ See, for instance, *Khulāsa-yi sharḥ at-ta'arruf*, p. 152; Mustamlī Bukhārī's *Sharḥ at-ta'arruf*, Vol. 2, p. 693; Kharaqānī, *Nūr al-'ulūm*, in J.E. Bertel's *Tasawwuf wa adabiyāt-i tasawwuf*, trans. S. Izādī, Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1357, pp. 334-35; *Sharḥ-i shathīyāt*, p. 383, ll. 5-7, p. 102, l. 4; see also H. Ritter, *Das Meer*, pp. 407, 432.

⁴⁴ *Sawānīh*, p. 42, faṣl 23 (1), ll. 2-4 and pp. 45-46, faṣl 25, ll. 9-15.

⁴⁵ See Kāshānī's *Kunūz al-asrār* in *Shurūḥ-i sawānīh*, pp. 13-14, ll. 255-270; p. 16, ll. 310-327; Nāgaurī, *Lawā'ih*, p. 97.

⁴⁶ J.T.P. de Bruijn in *El*, under Maḍjūn: 2. In Persian, Kurdish and Pashto literature.

⁴⁷ Khājū Kirmānī, *Dīwān*, ed. A. Suhaylī Khānsārī, Tehran: Pāzhang, 1369, see the index, Majnūn and Laylī.

⁴⁸ See *Dīwān-i kabīr*, ed. B.Z. Furūzānfar, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tehran, 1336, see the index, Majnūn and Laylī; *Ghazalḥā-yi Sa'dī*, ed. N.A. Irānparast, 2 Vols., Tehran: Dānish, 2535, see the index, Laylī and Majnūn.

⁴⁹ See Sa'dī, *Gulistān*, ed. Gh. Yūsufī, Tehran: Saḥāb, p. 144. Rūmī, *Fihī mā fihī*, ed. Furūzānfar, Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, pp. 16, 43, 51, 72, 149, 184; idem, *Mathnawī*,

Zephyr, each of which plays its own indispensable part.⁵⁰ Of these, ten may be called the main characters,⁵¹ the remainder being shadowy figures who serve to reinforce our image of the principle protagonists. My intention at this phase of the study is not to interpret the main characters of Nizāmī's poem, but to briefly characterise them, beginning in this and the following chapters with Majnūn himself.

The archetype of Majnūn's character is identical in early Arabic sources, where he is associated with chastity, madness, and poetic genius. These qualities are shared by other 'Udhrite lovers. According to Alessio Bombaci, the character of Majnūn in the Arabic writings is pathetic.⁵² In these sources, Majnūn is a flat character in the literal sense of E.M. Forster's definition. According to this definition, a flat character is simple, two-dimensional, highly predictable and does not change in the course of the story, whereas a round character is endowed with a complex of attributes, is multidimensional, unpredictable and capable of surprising behaviour.⁵³ In Arabic writings, even those traits that Majnūn is endowed with are not developed and receive no substantial treatment. Although Nizāmī maintains the principle qualities of the legendary Majnūn, and interweaves them with a complex of other traits, Majnūn does not become a rounded character in the modern literary sense: the legendary Majnūn can be easily identified in him. Nizāmī creates an archetype of Majnūn who meets all the requirements of an 'Udhrite lover to a perfect degree, but who can also surprise the reader by his actions, wake tears with his touching verses, and bafflement at his superior

Vol. 1, pp. 27-28, ll. 410-448, p. 130, 2703-2705; Vol. 3, pp. 32-34, ll. 567-597; Vol. 4, pp. 79-80, ll. 1534-1562; Vol. 5, pp. 158-60, ll. 3288-3326; idem, *Majālis-i sab'a*, ed. T. Subhānī, Tehran: Kayhān, 1365, p. 81, apart from this reference to Laylī and Majnūn, two passages from Nizāmī's poem are cited on pp. 76, 78; Khājū refers 18 times to the lovers and tells one anecdote about them in *Khamsa*, ed. S. Niyāz Kirmānī, pp. 45-6, ll. 922-41; p. 76, l. 1574; p. 183, l. 1574; p. 145, l. 836; p. 214, l. 274; p. 248, l. 852; p. 495, l. 541; p. 529, l. 1260; p. 591, l. 2545; p. 626, l. 3269; p. 639, l. 3527; p. 663, l. 4010; p. 570, l. 2129; p. 309, ll. 986, 989; p. 348, l. 1843; p. 440, l. 3835; p. 440, l. 3837; p. 452, l. 4100.

⁵⁰ I have decided to include all characters that are mentioned in the poem, including for instance Zaynab, the beloved of Zayd, who never says a word.

⁵¹ The main characters are Majnūn, Majnūn's father and mother, Majnūn's uncle, Laylī, Laylī's father, Naufal, Ibn Salām, Salām of Baghdād and Zayd.

⁵² A. Bombaci in *Laylī and Majnūn by Fuzūlī*, p. 67.

⁵³ G. Prince, *A Dictionary*, see Character, Round character, Flat character.

wisdom, a character who in the end becomes our model in the path of selfless love.⁵⁴

To avoid using terms derived from the criticism of modern literature, I prefer to identify Nizāmī's Majnūn as an 'empty' character, by which I mean that he can receive any attribute connected to love, madness, poetry and asceticism. Such characters can also be found in the medieval Western romance. John Stevens makes an acute observation about Chaucer's Troilus in comparison to the earlier romances of Chrétien de Troyes, which is equally applicable to Nizāmī's Majnūn in comparison to the Majnūn of Arabic legend. According to Stevens:

The romances of Chrétien de Troyes, such short poems as *Le Lai de l'Ombre*, *La Chatelaine de Vergi*, and Thomas's *Tristan* (...) contain much subtle analysis of the psychological state of being in love. But in none of these do we feel a psychological continuum to the degree that we feel it in Chaucer. For quite extended passages of Chaucer's poem we live imaginatively within the character's flux of mood and emotion; in Chrétien's romances we enter, on the whole, more static conditions.

Stevens adds that Troilus

is not 'a fully-rounded character,' in the novelistic sense, and was never intended to be. He is an elaborated symbol, a 'figure,' a Type; he is a sort of 'highest common factor' of courtly lovers, 'the mould of fashion, and the glass of form'; he is their epitome.⁵⁵

As in the 'Udhrite love poetry, the entire plot of the romance revolves around the lover, on an unremitting quest for his unattainable love. Nizāmī is aware of the legend and doubts whether this modest Bedouin tale would be suitable for the Iranian court. In chapter five of the introduction to the romance, the author refers to the legend as an *āya* whose *tafsīr* is sorrowful. The word *āya* means both a 'Koran verse,' and a 'sign' or 'wonder,' as well as 'paragon' and 'masterpiece.' Nizāmī says that legend needs a *tafsīr*, 'Koran exegesis,' 'explanation,' or 'commentary.' Such commentaries include details of the events that led to the revelation of the verse in question, an elaboration of the 'story' of the Koran, but may also extend to pious

⁵⁴ For Nizāmī's imitators see J.T.P. de Bruijn in *El*, under *Khamsa*. See also J.E. Bertel's, *Izbrannye Trudy*, pp. 275-313.

⁵⁵ J. Stevens, *Medieval Romance: Themes and Approaches*, London: Hutchinson University Library, 1973, pp. 175-76.

sentiments and esoteric interpretation. Thus Nizāmī is using a religious metaphor: as a verse of the Koran needs a commentary, the Arabic tale needs an elaboration. He is also warning his readers that such a sorrowful—and serious—theme does not entirely suit the highly conventional and polite style required of court literature:

Although this tale (*āya*) enjoys celebrity,
 a cheerful interpretation (*tafsīr*) is far from it.
 The tools of discourse are joy and amorous delight,
 discourse thrives by these two means.
 The discourse on a naked person, who is
 enamoured, fettered and in bondage, is sorrowful.
 If one was to adorn the tale to excess,
 this would distort the face of the story;
 But when I know not the way at some stage,
 clearly I shall then add some conceits.
 (ll. 53–7)

When Shirwānshāh Abū 'l-Muẓaffar Akhsitān commissioned Nizāmī to versify Majnūn's tragic love story, the poet found himself in a quandary. The writer of love-stories about the pompous and powerful pre-Islamic Iranian kings such as Khusrau Parwīz II is suddenly ordered to write a romance about a distraught and naked Arab boy. Nizāmī skilfully uses the sad nature of the legend to whet the reader's curiosity about how he will narrate this tragic but simple romance. Grief, as M.J. Toolan notes, is perhaps the most "powerful trigger," and strangeness, an element which attracts the reader to know the unknown.⁵⁶ The poet refers frequently to the Arab traditions and way of life to remind us of the story's foreign origin. Moreover, he promises the reader that despite the thin plot of the story, he will bring his poem to a dramatic perfection so that "unpierced pearls" will flow from the reader's eyes (5:64–5). With his profound knowledge of the human psyche, Nizāmī knows how to draw emotional effect by reshaping this strange and shallow story.⁵⁷

Nizāmī was at first reluctant to versify this tale. It was his fourteen-years-old son Muḥammad, who encouraged his father to undertake the task:

⁵⁶ M.A. Toolan, *Narrative*, p. 52.

⁵⁷ In the prologue to *Sharaf-nāma*, Nizāmī says: "Those whom I cause to weep like water, I can cause to laugh again like the sun." *Sharaf-nāma*, ed. W. Dastdirdī, p. 44, l. 2.

When you composed *Khusrau and Shīrīn*,
 you cheered the hearts of the people.
 You have to compose *Laylī and Majnūn*
 so that the precious pearl has a pair.
 This book is better to be written,
 a young peacock is better to have a mate. (...)
 Wherever love-tales are to be read,
 this tale will serve as salt for them.
 (ll. 43-5, 71)

Although Majnūn was to some extent a popular figure before Niẓāmī's time, his popularity increased dramatically after the appearance of Niẓāmī's romance. By collecting information from both secular and mystical sources about Majnūn, Niẓāmī portrayed such a vivid picture of this legendary lover that all subsequent poets were inspired by him, many of them imitated him and wrote their own versions of the romance. As we shall see in the following chapters, the poet uses various characteristics deriving from 'Udhrite love poetry and weaves them into his own Persian culture. In other words, Niẓāmī Persianises the poem by adding several techniques borrowed from the Persian epic tradition, such as the portrayal of characters, the relationship between characters, description of time and setting, etc. In order to appreciate this epoch-making poem, an attempt is made in the following chapters to analyse Majnūn's character from various angles, beginning with his physical appearance.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LOVER'S OUTWARD APPEARANCE

*chūn zard bidīd rūyam ān sabz-nigār
guftā ki digar ba waṣlam ummīd madār
zīrā ki tu dīdd-i mā shudī dar dīdār
tu rang-i khazān dārī-u mā rang-i bahār*

*When my green-cheeked idol looked on my yellow face
She said: "Hope no more for union with me.
Since in our meeting you have proved to be my opponent;
You have the colour of autumn while I have the colour of
spring."¹*

1. *Majnūn's physical description*

The external appearance of characters and their environment are often symbolic indications of their internal state. The person who is smitten by love reveals several physiological and psychological signs. The lover's symptoms have been described in theoretical treatises on love as well as in lyrics and romances. In these sources, it is said that the lover's heart pounds, and he suddenly blushes, stammers and becomes excited, when he sees the beloved.² Perturbed by love, the lover sleeps and eats less. Cataloguing the lover's signs in *Wīs and Rāmīn*, Gurgānī says that the lover's eyes are transfixed by the beloved's beauty, tears stream from his eyes and both feet become feeble.³ On seeing the beloved's paradise-like beauty, the lover's heart falls into the fire of hell.⁴ Gurgānī adds that the reason for the lover's blushing is love's fiery quality. The poet Farrukhī states that long suffering changes the lover's colour, he turns pale (lit. yellow), and

¹ *Sawānīh*, p. 70, *faṣl* 43, ll. 5–6.

² See Zangī's *Nuzhat al-‘āshiqīn* in *Zangī-nāma*, ed. I. Afshār, Tehran: Khāja, 1372, p. 146; Gurgānī, *Wīs u Rāmīn*, p. 33, l. 33.

³ For these and several other signs of the lover see Gurgānī, *Wīs u Rāmīn*, pp. 84–5, ll. 72–88; p. 239, l. 62.

⁴ *Wīs u Rāmīn*, p. 84, l. 69.

has a bent back. Poets have used numerous metaphors to express the lover's condition. The hunch-backed lover is sometimes compared to the bent back of a harp, whose strings are the lover's tears or his veins.⁵ The lover's pale complexion is usually compared to gold, or saffron. Using poetic hyperbole, one of the quatrains attributed to Abū Sa'īd states: "From my loving face, gold is raining and from my wet eyes, fire always pours."⁶ Sayyid Ḥasan Ghaznawī compares the beloved's body to silver and the lover's pale body to gold: then he suggests: "I want to buy raw silver with molten gold."⁷

In *Laylī and Majnūn*, Niẓāmī not only repeats the stereotypical descriptions of the lover mentioned above, he also adds another dimension to Majnūn's character by focusing on his emaciated body and his nakedness. Compared to his other romances, in which the protagonist's physical appearance is elaborately depicted, Niẓāmī gives relatively little attention to Majnūn's facial appearance. Only in chapter thirteen, which marks the beginning of the story, is there an extended description of Majnūn.

Majnūn has all the stereotypical attributes to be found in Persian love lyrics. The infant Majnūn is likened to a blooming rose. After his birth, Majnūn is immediately given to wet-nurses, who suckle Majnūn with the milk of love, affection and friendship. When he is two weeks old, his face becomes as bright, radiant and round as the full moon. As time passes, he grows to perfection by learning various sorts of *hunar*, 'crafts' or 'virtues'.⁸ It is not long before he receives the name of 'Qays the Virtuous' (*Qays-i hunarī*). Reaching the age of ten, he becomes so lovely that everyone talks about him. At that age, Qays is sent to school, where he meets Laylī and falls in love with her.

Having described his early years briefly, the remaining chapters are devoted to the effects of love on Majnūn. As we shall see in the next sections, snake and plant metaphors are used to prompt readers to construct their own mental image of Majnūn's emaciated body.

⁵ See *Nuzhat al-majālis*, (1366) p. 160, (1375) p. 197, q. 382.

⁶ *Sukhanān-i manẓūm-i Abū Sa'īd*, p. 27, q. 187.

⁷ Sayyid Ḥasan Ghaznawī, *Dīwān*, ed. Taqī Mudarris Raḍawī, Tehran: Asāṭīr, 1362, p. 283.

⁸ For a short discussion of *hunar* in Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma* see D. Bayat-Sarmadi, *Erziehung und Bildung im Schahname*, Freiburg: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1970, pp. 53–5.

2. *Majnūn and the snake*

To highlight several of Majnūn's character traits, Nizāmī compares him to a snake. The snake is an ambiguous symbol in Persian literature.⁹ In Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma*, the mythical tyrant king Dāhāk is portrayed with a snake on each shoulder. He feeds them with the brains of Persian boys every day. Likewise, in Sufism the snake symbolises the 'base self' and the world. At the same time, it is associated with treasure and mystical revelation, being a symbol of transformation.¹⁰ Just as the snake sloughs off its old skin and appears shining in a new dress, the mystic annihilates his ego and lives eternally in the thought of the beloved. Several references to benign snakes can be found in Muḥammad Munawwar's hagiography *Asrār at-tauḥīd*. For instance, when the mystic Abū Sa'īd Abū 'l-Khayr (357/978–440/1061) wants to punish a disciple, he sends him to a district in which a black serpent lives. Abū Sa'īd describes the snake as one of his 'friends': "This snake has been our friend for seven years and we found much comfort and relaxation from each other's companionship."¹¹ In his hagiography, *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, 'Aṭṭār describes another benign snake that fans mystic lovers "with a branch of narcissus held in its mouth."¹²

Nizāmī's symbolic use of the snake is connected to three aspects of Majnūn's character: it refers to Majnūn's union with Laylī; it shows how he watches over Laylī like a snake guarding a treasure;

⁹ I have discussed the symbolism of the snake in classical Persian literature in "Majnūn's Image as a Serpent" in *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi*, eds. K. Talattof & J.W. Clinton, New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp. 83–95.

¹⁰ See Ghazālī's *Kīmīyā*, Vol. 1, pp. 95–8. For snake symbolism in Rūmī's works see A. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p. 112. For the image of the snake in Arabic literature see J. Ruska in *EI*, under Ḥayya. See also L. Kopf in *EI*, under Af'ā. The snake occurs in the Koran (20:20), in the episode in which Moses turns his rod into a snake.

¹¹ Abū Sa'īd Abū 'l-Khayr, *Asrār at-tauḥīd fī maqāmāt ash-shaykh Abī Sa'īd*, ed. M.R. Shafī'ī Kadkanī, Tehran: Āgāh, 1371, pp. 99–101. The snake appears in two other places and frightens the Shaykh's disciples, but Abū Sa'īd explains that it is his close friend. See *ibid.*, pp. 100, 150. It is not clear, however, whether this specific snake is the same beast used by Bāyazīd as his whip while riding on the back of a lion. See *ibid.*, p. 253. This story is also retold by Rūmī; see *Mathnawī*, Vol. 6, pp. 102–03, ll. 2133–2159. In Mustamlī Bukhārī's bulky commentary of Kalābādī's *Kitāb at-ta'aruf*, there is also a story about a beneficial snake that saves the life of a mystic. See Mustamlī Bukhārī, *Sharḥ at-ta'aruf*, Vol. 4, pp. 1792–3.

¹² 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, pp. 46, 184; see also Hujwīrī, *Kashaf al-mahjūb*, p. 118.

and it refers to Majnūn's physical appearance. To depict Majnūn's union with Laylī, Nizāmī uses the following snake imagery in chapter 19:24–5, in which Majnūn's father brings his son to the Ka'ba. In this scene, Majnūn identifies the holy House with Laylī and suddenly "jumps like a snake," holding the Ka'ba's door-knocker:

Majnūn jumped like a snake from its coil,
grasping the coil of the Ka'ba's curls in his hand.
Pressing the coil (i.e. door-knocker) to his bosom, he cried:
"Today, I am like the coil upon the door."

In Arabic sources such as Abū 'l-Faraj al-Isfahānī's *Kitāb al-aghānī*, Majnūn holds the coverings (*astār*) of the Ka'ba and prays to God.¹³ According to A.L.F.A. Beelaert, Khāqānī may have invented the comparison between the door-knocker and the beloved's curly locks but it was Nizāmī who invented the comparison between the Ka'ba and Laylī.¹⁴ Nizāmī combines two images in one to depict Majnūn's symbolic union with Laylī: the lover's desire to become a lock on the beloved's head and the conventional comparison of the beloved's black locks to the snake. By calling Majnūn a snake, Nizāmī establishes a union between the locks and the lover through their nature: both the lover and the locks are snake-like and the desire of the lover to be like the locks of the beloved is thereby fulfilled. To this Nizāmī adds the image of the door-knocker as a snake, invoking Laylī as the holy Ka'ba and Majnūn as a pilgrim (*hājji*).¹⁵

In several other passages Nizāmī portrays Majnūn as a snake keeping watch over his treasure: Laylī. In chapter 48:17, Majnūn compares Laylī to both treasure and a snake: "O, while you are a treasure in the hands of the rivals/you grow into a snake in the hands of your friends." When Laylī dies, Majnūn's reaction is depicted as follows in chapter 62:42–3:

He rolled like a snake [on Laylī's grave]
or a worm coiling beneath a thorn.
With a thousand toils, he coiled himself around
the grave-stone, like a snake on a treasure.

¹³ Abū 'l-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, Vol. 2, pp. 21–2.

¹⁴ For the development of the image see chapter four of A.L.F.A. Beelaert, *A Cure for the Grieving*. Nizāmī also uses this image in an ode (*qaṣīda*). See *Ganjīna-yi Ganjāwī*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 203; *Dīwān-i qaṣā'id*, pp. 232–234, ll. 199–232.

¹⁵ For the religious terminology in *Laylī and Majnūn* see *infra*, chapter 11:3, pp. 227–34.

At her grave, Majnūn sings an elegy in which he takes Laylī as his 'companion of the cave' (*yār-i ghār*), an allusion to the Prophet's historical journey from Mecca to Medina during which he had to take refuge in a cave with the first Caliph, Abū Bakr. In this elegy, Majnūn identifies himself with a snake sitting on a costly treasure:

The cave is always the home of a snake;
 O Moon, why has the cave become your residence?
 I shall lament in your cave, for you are my beloved;
 you are the companion of the cave (*yār-i ghār*), how can I not weep?
 You turned out to be a treasure in the earth;
 If you are not a treasure, why are you then thus [in the earth]?
 Every treasure in a cave,
 has a snake upon its skirts.
 I am that snake suffering in its hole;
 on your grave, I am the sentinel, watching the treasure.
 (ll. 67-71)

Traditionally, it was believed that snakes protected valuable treasures in caves or ruins. It is clear why Nizāmī associates Majnūn and Laylī with a snake and a treasure. The last scene vividly depicts Laylī as a treasure in her tomb. Interestingly, the image is also reversed. Laylī and her emotions are also compared to a snake.¹⁶ In chapter 36:19, Nizāmī vividly depicts how Laylī is imprisoned and how her feelings are repressed. She is writhing in her house like a snake whose head is cut off. She can only secretly come to the roof, hoping to hear a word from Majnūn: "In the confinement of her house, upon the roof/she lived like a snake deprived of its head." Similarly, Majnūn is compared to a treasure. In chapter 20:28, Majnūn is likened to a treasure hidden in a corner. "The secluded man whose ear was pierced/was hidden in a corner like a treasure." In mystical literature, ascetics are often described as a treasure living in a cave or a ruined place.¹⁷

In chapter 64:6-8, Majnūn's dying movements at Laylī's grave are again likened to those of a snake:

¹⁶ See, for instance, chapter 52:2, in which Laylī's sorrow is compared to a snake that twists its tail in pain: "Being sorrowful for her beloved, she became like the tail of a snake/which means 'to be trapped by a thousand-fold sorrow.'"

¹⁷ In Tarsūsī, *Dārāb-nāma* (Vol. 1, pp. 80-2), when the hero flees from his enemies and seeks refuge in a cave, he unexpectedly sees an old ascetic, who claims to be appointed by God to help him.

While wailing in pain,
 Majnūn approached that earthly bride.
 He fell on the ring of that enclosure (i.e. tomb);
 his ship fell in turbid water.
 He rolled like a wounded ant;
 he twisted like a bitten snake.

Majnūn's physical appearance is repeatedly compared to a snake. The reasons for the comparison are Majnūn's emaciated body, his living in a cave and his writhing. It may also have to do with Majnūn's nickname, which means 'to be possessed by a *jinn*.' The *jinn* can assume any form, but it prefers especially the form of the snake, lizard or other creeping creature.¹⁸ Several references are made to Majnūn's physical appearance. The first occurs in chapter 20:47–53, in which someone from the tribe of Banū Sa'd describes how Majnūn lives in a "desolate ruined place, and how he creeps like a snake between stones." Majnūn's physical appearance is described in chapter 39:20–6, in which Majnūn's father visits his son:

He saw Majnūn, but not as his eyes desired to see him;
 As he saw Majnūn, his heart rose from its place.
 He looked at a moving soul, without a body,
 [a bunch] of bones shrouded by skin.
 A destitute of the world of existence;
 withdrawing on the road of idol-worshipping.
 Like a stick bound to a shadow-puppet;
 a lock of hair escaped from the mouth of death.
 Running on the earth faster than a dog;
 being more hidden than the habitants beneath the earth.
 The cauldron of his frame had become cold,
 falling on his brain, he lost his senses.
 Twisting itself in its twisting like a snake;
 no covering on his head while slumbering away.

3. *Majnūn and the kingdom of plants*

In addition to the ophidian metaphors portraying Majnūn's physical appearance, Nizāmī uses the imagery of flowers and trees to depict Majnūn's emaciated, naked and wounded body. J. Scott

¹⁸ See Th. Nöldeke in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, under Arabs, p. 669; see also D.B. MacDonald & H. Massé in *El*, *Djinn*.

Meisami rejects any association of Majnūn with flora. She argues that "Majnūn is regularly associated with the sterile, inhospitable desert" and Laylī with gardens and fertility.¹⁹ Contrary to J. Scott Meisami's view, Majnūn is associated with flowers and trees from the beginning of the poem. In chapter 13:10–3, the desire of Majnūn's father for a child is depicted through a botanical metaphor. Majnūn's father is presented as a cypress tree, desiring to have another cypress grow from his side:

He longed for the hand of his fortune
to make a bough sprout from his tree.
In other words, when his cypress withers
may another cypress sprout from its root,
So that when the pheasant grazes in the greenery,
it will see one cypress in place of the other,
And when it does not see the old cypress any more,
it can repose in the shadow of the new.

When Majnūn is born, he is compared to flowers and blossoms: "A fresh rose resembling a smiling pomegranate/what a pomegranate! what a rose! a thousand-fold likeness." (l. 29) As Majnūn reaches the age of two, he grows in the "garden of love" and when he is seven years old, "violets adorn his tulip," i.e. curly locks grow around his cheeks.

Both in the penultimate citation and in several other places in the poem, Majnūn is repeatedly associated with the cypress tree. In Persian mysticism, the evergreen cypress symbolises eternity. By comparing Majnūn to this particular tree, the poet alludes to Majnūn's everlasting love.²⁰ In chapter 25:50–3, in which Laylī visits a date orchard, she sees a cypress. She is instantly reminded of Majnūn, and calls to him:

O my faithful and consenting beloved;
O you who are like me and suit me well,
O fresh cypress shoot that is a chevalier,
O you who have a warm heart and a cold breath,
I wished you would arrive from the door of such a garden
and remove the brand-mark from my heart.

¹⁹ J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 161; idem, "The Body as a Garden: Nature and Sexuality in Persian Poetry" in *Edebiyât*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1995, pp. 265–66.

²⁰ See *infra*, chapter 14:4, p. 325.

To sit with me according to the desire of your heart;
I behold the elm-tree, and you the cypress.

In chapter 65:28, when Zayd dreams of Laylī and Majnūn in Paradise, he compares them to cypress trees:

What are the names of these cypress trees
that hold cups in their hands in the garden of Iram?

In chapter 27:83–4, 86–8 in which the chivalrous Naufal promises Majnūn to unite him with his beloved, Majnūn is again portrayed with garden imagery. When Majnūn comes to an agreement with the gallant warrior,

His pale (lit. 'yellow') countenance turned purple;
his bent body straightened like the bamboo.
His musk-coloured black line
encircled the round moon of his face.
The bright dawn smiled again; (. . .)
the sun laid bare its teeth.
The enchained man of the desert recovered his senses;
at home, the manacles were removed from the fettered man.
In the garden, the green turned tranquil;
a beaker was given to the hand of the red rose.

Here, Nizāmī depicts Majnūn's recuperation by comparing his face to the moon's brilliance, to the radiance of the sun. His tall stature is likened to a cypress, to a flourishing red rose in the garden. In chapter 18:93–4, not only does the poet compare Majnūn to a rose and rosewater, he also wishes to perfume himself with this rosewater:

And now that his rose is wilted,
the last drops of him are attar of roses.
I, too, through this fragrant rosewater
refresh my waters in this brook.

In chapter 60:21, Laylī compares Majnūn several times to various plants and flowers. For instance, when Laylī asks Zayd to bring Majnūn to her, she compares Majnūn to a cypress and to a jasmine: "Make the cypress the bed-mate of the meadow/put the jasmine together with the tulip." Again, to depict their emotional meeting, Nizāmī uses floral imagery (l. 49): "She fell at the feet of her searcher/like grass at the feet of a box-tree."

In several passages, Majnūn's relapse is depicted with the image of a withered flower. For instance, in chapter 34:3, in which Majnūn

speaks to a raven, he is likened to a withered rose: "He floated in the water of his eyes/like a rose, which has reached its autumn."²¹ Laylī is also compared to a rose. In chapter 26:25–6, when Ibn Salām comes to ask for the hand of Laylī, Laylī's father indirectly compares Majnūn to a thorn and Laylī to a rose:

(...) we must patiently wait
for a number of days for this [marriage] contract,
so that the rose's blossoms sprout
and the thorns are removed from the gate of the garden.

Despite the absence of a substantial description of Majnūn's physical appearance, Nizāmī portrays his character so vividly that Majnūn has acquired an ontological status; he lives in the mind of the reader as an emaciated and naked person dwelling in caves like a snake, guarding his treasure, Laylī. When the image of an ascetic is applied to him, Majnūn himself can be taken as a treasure dwelling in a cave. The attributes of his physical appearance overlap his internal psychological state: being deeply in love and separated from Laylī, he becomes emaciated because of insomnia, lack of appetite and intense concentration on the beloved. Majnūn's portrayal as a cypress tree and as a flower sheds light on another aspect of his character: his immortal love is like the cypress, a symbolism with a strong mystical dimension. His relationship to the world of plants also has a significance that may at first sight go unnoticed: as we shall see in the next chapter, Majnūn is portrayed as a vegetarian. Furthermore, Nizāmī depicts Majnūn's physical decline through the image of a thirsty flower. The representation is linked to another image in the poem, namely the metaphor of the Fountain of Life (i.e. Laylī) and the desert traveller (Majnūn) in search of this Fountain; not finding the fountain, the traveller will die.²²

²¹ "The water of his eyes" is a reference to Majnūn's tears.

²² For this metaphor see *infra*, chapter 14:6, pp. 332–33.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ASCETIC AND THE LOVER

*raftam ba ṭabīb-u guftam az dard-i nahān
guftā zi ghayr-i dūst bar band zabān
guftam ki ghadhā guft hamīn khūn-i jigar
guftam parhīz guft az har du jahān*

*I went to the doctor and told him of my hidden pain;
He said: "Speak of none except the Friend;"
I asked about diet. He said: "The very blood of your
heart."
I said, "What of abstinence?" He said: "From both
worlds."¹*

1. *Majnūn's asceticism*

Asceticism features in Niẓāmī's romances not only because of the poet's own leanings, but also because the lover's situation and condition resemble those of an ascetic. Niẓāmī deals with ascetic ideas extensively in *Makhzan al-asrār*, a mystical poem in which he links himself with dervishes rather than with people belonging to other walks of life. He presents himself as an example: "Like Niẓāmī, retreat from the world."² In another place, he says that freeing oneself from other people is a good work.³ The theme of asceticism also occurs frequently in his other works. The poet left his hometown of Ganja only once, and lived as a recluse.⁴ Niẓāmī's secluded way of life became a model for others, such as the poet 'Aṣṣār of Tabrīz, who imitated both his romances and his lifestyle. In his *Mihr and Mushtarī*, 'Aṣṣār says: "Like Niẓāmī, I sat in seclusion, shutting the door of the house of retreat to the people."⁵

¹ *Sukhanān-i manẓūm-i Abū Sa'īd*, p. 71, q. 489.

² *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 77, l. 3. There are numerous references in Niẓāmī's writings in which he explicitly prefers seclusion.

³ *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 78, l. 9.

⁴ See W. Bartholds & J.A. Boyle in *EL*, under Gandja; Niẓāmī often states that he is *shahr-band*, literally 'bound to the town.' For a study of this term see B. Tharwatīyān & M. Ibrāhīmōv, *Niẓāmī-yi Ganjauī*, Tabrīz: Arg-i Tabrīz, 1370, pp. 9-11.

⁵ As quoted in *Ẓindigī wa andīsha-yi Niẓāmī*, A. Mubārīz *et al.*, trans. H.M. Şiddīq, Tehran: Tūs, 1360, p. 161.

The resemblance between a lover and an ascetic is most perceptible in *Laylī and Majnūn*, since Nizāmī magnifies almost all the attributes of Majnūn to the extreme. It is, in fact, difficult for the reader to draw a clear line between Majnūn as an ascetic and Majnūn as a lover. Yet Julie Scott Meisami, 'A.A. Sa'īdī Sīrjānī and M.W. Dols reject any ascetic and mystical interpretation of the character of Majnūn. Surprisingly enough, there has been no substantial analysis of this aspect of Majnūn's character.

Majnūn closely observes the ascetic principles of celibacy, mortification, silence, seclusion, sleep deprivation and abstinence from food. As we will see below, there is a perfect physical and spiritual parallelism between a lover such as Majnūn and an ascetic. Tor Andrae's portrayal of a Christian and Islamic ascetic corresponds completely to Nizāmī's depiction of Majnūn's character. Andrae describes an ascetic as an emaciated being who is "dried up like a cracked bag of skin, bent like an archway, so thin that the sun shines through his ribs, red-eyed and with deep furrows in his cheeks from the constant flow of his tears."⁶ Moreover, aside from the resemblance between the lover and the ascetic, ascetic disciplines, as expounded by Rūzbihān Baqlī, prepare the lover to serve the beloved. Asceticism is not only an exercise by which the lover can attain to the stage of 'servitude' (*'ubūdiyya*), but also an indispensable attribute of the lover.⁷ As Hujwīrī has said: "Servitude cannot be attained except by adhering to four means: denying oneself food, nakedness, poverty and humiliation."⁸

Before attempting to analyse Majnūn's asceticism systematically, it is necessary to briefly consider the background of Islamic asceticism as expounded in theoretical writings.⁹ The early traces of Islamic asceticism (*zuhd* or *nusk*) manifested themselves under the influence of Christianity during the Prophet's lifetime.¹⁰ The early ascetics fol-

⁶ T. Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles: Studies in Early Islamic Mysticism*, trans. B. Sharpe, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987, p. 33.

⁷ 'Abhar, p. 49, section 107, ll. 12-16.

⁸ *Tarjuma-yi risāla-yi Qushayriyya*, p. 304.

⁹ *Kimiyā*, Vol. 2, pp. 37-54; *Ihyā'*, Vol. 4, pp. 189-210; *Tarjuma-yi risāla-yi Qushayriyya*, pp. 174-180; 'Azīz ad-Dīn Nasafī, *Kitāb al-insān al-kāmil* in *Majmū'a-yi rasā'il-i mashhūr ba kitāb al-insān-i al-kāmil*, ed. M. Molé, Teheran: Institut Français d'Iranologie de Téhéran, 1983, pp. 332-35; Sanā'ī, *Hadīqa*, pp. 133-36; Aḥmad-i Jām, *Uns at-tā'ibīn*, pp. 143-49.

¹⁰ For a discussion of asceticism see 'A.H. Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla-yi justijū*, pp. 10-13; idem, *Arzish-i mirāth-i šūfiyya*, Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1353, pp. 33-67. A.B. Gulpinarli, *Maulānā Jalāl ad-Dīn*, pp. 241-48; R.A. Nicholson in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, under Asceticism (Muslim). T. Andrae, *In the Garden*, chapter 2 on "Asceticism."

lowed the model of the Christian monks who lived a monastic and austere life. Like Christian monks, Islamic ascetics severed themselves from mankind, focused all sensory organs on God, refrained from sleep, renounced dress, and denied themselves food. Although the Prophet repudiated such extreme practices, these ideas provided the basis for Sufism and early mystic figures such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (21–110/642–728), Maʿrūf Karkhī (d. 815), Abū Saʿīd Abū ʿl-Khayr (357/978–440/1061), and Sulaymān Dārānī (d. 215/830).¹¹ The ascetic consciously and intentionally maintains these practices to discipline his 'lower soul' (*nafs*). *Nafs* is regarded as the centre of carnal desire, greed, and passion. The ascetic abstains from everything that estranges him from God. His goal is to detach his heart from created things and to discipline his soul. Since the soul lives in this corrupt and base world, it has become like a wild horse. It should be tamed in order to be admitted to the other world. Mystics love this horse imagery and use it extensively to describe the stages of mortification (*riyāḍa*). 'The tamed one' (*murtād*) is a common synonym for the ascetic.¹² Islam promises the believer an eternal life in the world hereafter. This world is taken as a station where one prepares one's provisions for the other world. The final goal of the ascetic is to renounce the world of outward forms entirely, in order to attain a metaphysical perception. The *malāmātī* Sufis even went so far as to renounce their intentions and desires, relying absolutely on God (*tawakkul*). 'Azīz ad-Dīn Nasafī takes asceticism as a 'transaction' (*muʿāmala*) contracted between man and God. The ascetic gives up the perishable world in exchange for the perennial one.¹³

H. Ritter, *Das Meer*, chapter 12 and index, under Askese; and A.J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, London: George Allen, 1968, pp. 31–44. For the ascetic training of Ibrāhīm-i Adham see R.A. Nicholson's biographical account of this mystic, "Ibrāhīm b. Adham" in *Zeitschrift Für Assyriologie*, 1912, pp. 215–20.

¹¹ For Ḥasan al-Baṣrī see H. Ritter, "Studien zur Geschichten der islamischen Frömmigkeit" in *Der Islam* (1933); idem in *EL*, under Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. For Abū Saʿīd's asceticism see F. Meier, *Abū Saʿīd-i Abū ʿl-Ḥayr, Wirklichkeit und Legende. Acta Iranica*, 3/4, Tehran/Liège: 1976, pp. 69–73; see also R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 11–16; Nizāmī's ideas and his Majnūn closely resemble Ṣaḥl b. ʿAbdullāh Tustarī; for an analysis of this mystic see M. Dihqānī "Pazhūhishī dar bāra-yi zindigī, āthār wa aḥwāl-i Ṣaḥl b. ʿAbdullāh Tustarī (203–283 H.Q.)" in *Aj-nāma*, ed. M. Bāqirzāda, Tehran: Tūs, 1377, Vol. 2, pp. 11–49.

¹² Muḥammad Ghazālī uses the metaphor of a falcon that should be put in a cage, and its eyes hooded so that it forgets its wild habits and obeys its master. see *Kimīyā*, Vol. 2, p. 22; Ibn ʿAbbādī, *Ṣūfī-nāma*, pp. 55–6; Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 52, ll. 12–15; Nizāmī, *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 52, l. 5.

¹³ *Kūāb al-insān al-kāmil*, p. 334.

The lover undergoes an experience similar to that of an ascetic. Like an ascetic, the lover cannot eat and sleep because of separation from the beloved. His mind is preoccupied with the beloved, so that everything else, including other people, become secondary if not redundant to him. Wherever he looks, he discerns the image of the beloved. The chief difference between a lover and an ascetic is that the latter acts deliberately, whereas in the case of a lover, love is the agent causing the lover to experience sleeplessness, to deny himself food, to meditate constantly on the beloved, to speak only of the beloved and to shy away from people because the only being who satisfies him is the beloved. Nizāmī's Majnūn is a complex character showing both the ascetic practice of deliberate disentanglement from the world and the force of love that forces the lover to concentrate only on the beloved.

2. Vegetarianism and denial of food

To eat as little as possible and to abstain from consuming meat are practical methods to discipline *nafs*. This practice is one of the principles of asceticism dwelled upon by ethical and mystical writers such as Hujwīrī, 'Aṭṭār, Muḥammad Ghazālī and many other writers.¹⁴ In both his *Kīmiyā* and *Iḥyā'*, Ghazālī mentions ten advantages of eating little. Before enumerating these advantages, Ghazālī refers to Adam's expulsion from Paradise, which was on account of his covetous desire for a grain of wheat.¹⁵ Ghazālī continues: "Gluttony is

¹⁴ Numerous other titles could be added, such as Najm ad-Dīn Dāya's, *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, Maḥmūd Kāshānī's *Miṣbāḥ al-hidāya*, and Mustamlī Bukhārī's *Sharḥ at-ta'arruf*.

¹⁵ Nizāmī also uses the story that a grain of wheat became the cause of Adam's banishment from Paradise: "O you in whom the trace of the soul is lost / a grain of wheat has been your lure // Break a loaf made of barley, and have patience / so that you do not eat the seductive grain of wheat." See *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 72. This is an important theme for Persian writers: see, for instance, Hujwīrī's *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 420. On account of the story of Adam's banishment, many mystics avoid eating bread made of wheat, preferring barley bread. Nizāmī goes on to describe the harm caused by gluttony: "(...) from eating too quickly / preserve your wits by eating little // The lion is active because of its own slight consumption / eating without restraint is the manner of fire // Since the day is content with the half (12 hours) / it is the light of the eyes of the wise // Since night drank the wine of morning at an unsuitable time / the excess of blood made its body black. // The brain will be reduced by eating much / the heart, which resembles sweet basil, *sīpar-gham*, will become the shield of sorrow, *sīpar-gham*." The phrase "The excess of blood" refers to the red colour of the sun-set.

the source of all other desires because when the stomach is filled up, the craving for carnal desire arises. The desire of the stomach and for the sensual appetites cannot be realised except by money. Thus the desire for wealth is awakened. Money cannot be attained, however, except by achieving position and status. Thus the desire for position appears. The position and the wealth cannot be protected except by disputing with people. From this arises grudge, fanaticism, enmity, haughtiness, dissimulation, rancour and dissension." Furthermore, Ghazālī mentions numerous Prophetic traditions in favour of hunger. The most famous ones are the following: "Satan circulates in the human body like blood in the veins; narrow his way by hunger." "Keep your hearts alive by laughing little and purify them through hunger so that their purity intensifies." "Do not eat much because the light of Gnosticism (*ma'rifa*) will be destroyed in your heart." "The most learned amongst you in God's sight is he whose meditation and hunger is longer, and the most hostile amongst you is he who eats, drinks and sleeps much." "Hunger is a pearl in God's treasury. He gives it to those whom He loves. He will not give it to everyone."¹⁶

Aside from the regular advice of denying oneself food, a particular emphasis is also put in theoretical works on abstaining from consuming meat. In Zoroastrianism, as reflected in the *Bundahishn*, the eating of flesh was the great sin committed by the first human couple.¹⁷ Although there is no explicit reference to vegetarianism in Muḥammad Ghazālī's work, he advises the reader to avoid eating meat in a number of places. On the basis of a tradition reported from the fourth Caliph, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, Ghazālī says: "The heart of one who consumes meat continuously for forty days will become hard, and he who does not consume meat for forty days will attain a gentle conduct." However this tradition is immediately followed by a counter-tradition from the second Caliph, 'Umar, which Ghazālī takes to be

¹⁶ *Kīmīyā*, Vol. 2, pp. 37, 40–5. The ten benefits of eating little and feeling hunger can be briefly summarized as follows: a) hunger purifies the heart; b) it makes the heart gentle so that man savours invocation and prayer; c) and leads man to the threshold of Paradise; d) those who eat much forget the hungry and have no compassion for people and forget the punishment of the hereafter; e) hunger disciplines the lower soul; f) it reduces sleep; g) expands the world before man's eye so that he busies himself with an occupation and learning; h) makes man healthy; i) means that he needs little money; and j) he becomes altruistic. More or less the same idea is repeated in 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkira*, pp. 239–40.

¹⁷ J. Duchesne-Guillemin, "Zoroastrian Religion" in *Cambridge History of Iran*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Vol. 3 (2), p. 979.

more moderate (*mu'tadil*): "Umar advised his son to eat in turn meat, oil, milk, vinegar and bread."¹⁸

Many of the saints portrayed in hagiographies and ethico-mystical books avoid eating meat. Mustamlī Bukhārī integrates vegetarianism into asceticism when he tells how Jesus, the archetype of asceticism, feeds on "plants and the leaves of trees."¹⁹ Vegetarianism is a sign of the mystic who has control of his *nafs*. Fighting against one's lower soul (*mujaḥadat an-nafs*) is regarded as a prerequisite for 'contemplation on the Truth' (*mushāḥadat al-ḥaqq*). Like other Islamic mystic theorists, Hujwīrī takes the battle against one's lower soul as the 'greater struggle' (*al-jihād al-akbar*), in contrast to the 'lesser struggle' (*al-jihād al-aṣghar*), which is Holy War.²⁰

In 'Aṭṭār's work too, abstaining from eating meat and maintaining hunger are means to subdue the lower soul.²¹ In 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkira*, Yaḥyā Ma'ādh Rāzī (d. 258/871) is presented as describing hunger as a "mortification for disciples; an experience for penitents; a punishment for ascetics and a noble deed for Gnostics."²² Numerous mystics have been vegetarians: several of those mentioned in 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkira* feed on thorns and thistles. The famous Rābi'a shuns meat and scolds her fellow mystic Ḥasan of Baṣra who eats soup:²³

It is reported that one day, Rābi'a journeyed to a mountain, where a host of gazelles, goats, onagers and other beasts circled her. While gazing at her, they approached her. All of a sudden Ḥasan of Baṣra appeared. Seeing Rābi'a, he hastened towards her. When the beasts saw Ḥasan, they fled immediately, and Rābi'a remained alone. Seeing this, Ḥasan's colour changed and he asked Rābi'a why the beasts fled from him while they were intimate with her. Rābi'a said to him: "What did you eat today?" He replied: "A bit of onion soup." She then answered: "You eat their fat, how shall they not flee from you."²⁴

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁹ *Sharḥ at-ta'arruf*, Vol. 3, p. 1221; see also Vol. 1, p. 141. I do not know of any Persian or Arabian poet who was vegetarian, except that Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī is said to have been vegetarian. See G.J.H. van Gelder, *Of Food and Discourse: Classical Arabic Literary Representations of Food*, Richmond: Curzon, 2000, pp. 87–88. In his *Apologia*, 'Ayn al-Qudāt names 'Abd al-ʿAṣṣaf, one of the early mystics of Baghdad who, according to A.J. Arberry, was a vegetarian. See A.J. Arberry, *A Sufi Martyr: the Apologia of 'Ain al-Qudāt al-Hamadānī*, London: George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1969, p. 42 and p. 75, no. 52.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 252.

²¹ See Kāshānī's *Misbāḥ al-hidāya*, pp. 270–83.

²² *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 319. The same tradition occurs in *Tarjuma-yi risāla-yi Qushayriyya*, p. 212.

²³ *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 70.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 70. This story is also versified by 'Aṭṭār in *Ilāhī-nāma*, pp. 120–21.

Mālik Dīnār, another Sufi saint, feeds on plants. However he once fell ill and craved for meat. He went to a butcher and bought some bits of meat. The astonished butcher, who knew that the mystic had avoided meat for many years, sent someone after him to see what he was going to do with it. The person returned weeping and said: "Mālik went to an abandoned place and smelled the meat two or three times and then said: 'O *nafs* you may have no more' and then gave the meat to the poor."²⁵ Mālik said: "I do not understand the saying that 'the intellect of one who has not eaten meat for forty days will be impaired.' I have not eaten meat for twenty years and my intellect increases each day."²⁶ Another famous mystic, Sufyān Thaurī mentions the following Prophetic tradition to condemn the eating of meat: "God takes the members of the house who eat much meat."²⁷ The mystic, Sulaymān Dārānī says: "Hunger is the key to the hereafter and gluttony is the key to this world."²⁸ Nakhjawānī links hunger and avoidance of sleep to love, in his *Ṭarīq at-tahqīq*: "He who has news of love's beginning / always guards himself from eating and sleeping // (. . .) unless you reduce your eating and sleeping / limiting your food and drink // you cannot breathe by love / you may remain shut in this house of concupiscence."²⁹

Nizāmī reflects the same ascetic sentiments in his works, especially in *Laylī and Majnūn*. Nizāmī skilfully presents various aspects of asceticism by relating them to the effects of love on Majnūn. By showing Majnūn following the ascetic way of life, Nizāmī underscores the mystical aspect of the poem. An attempt will be made below to briefly illustrate Majnūn's vegetarianism (*gīyāh-khārī*) and his denying himself food.

As early as chapter 4:17–8, Nizāmī censures covetousness and gluttony, advising his reader to eat little:

He who has laid down our foundation
has not made us for the sake of passion, sleeping and eating.
It is better if you avoid eating and drinking
for you can find these in cows and donkeys as well.

²⁵ *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 48.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 239. The tradition also occurs in *Tarjuma-yi risāla-yi Qushayriyya*, p. 213; *Sharḥ at-ta'arruf*, Vol. I, p. 207.

²⁹ *Ṭarīq at-tahqīq*, ed. B. Utaş, p. 29, ll. 509–20.

Perhaps the most evident example of the dramatic effects of gluttony in all Nizāmī's works is the husband who is imposed on Laylī, whose death is caused by his negligence of his regimen. Ibn Salām's material wealth, gluttony and superficiality contrast to Majnūn's spiritual richness, his avoidance of eating and his thorough spiritual vision. The first signs of Majnūn's growing reluctance to eat occur in chapter twenty. Although there is no explicit mention of vegetarianism at this point, Majnūn's love-sickness is said to have pervaded his existence, cutting him off from worldly attachments.

Nizāmī is not linking Majnūn with asceticism, but also showing the strong effect of love, which causes loss of appetite and gradually weakens the person under its spell, until it eventually eliminates him. In Persian theoretical treatises, love is usually depicted as a creeper ('*ashiqā*) or 'bindweed' (*lablāb*), which twines itself around a tree and deprives it of its life.³⁰ One of the earliest texts in which love is compared to a creeper and extensively elaborated upon is by the mystic martyr Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, who gives an etymology of love as well as an extensive description of its growth in *Mū'nis al-'ushshāq* (*The Intimate of the Lovers*). Here the author depicts both the physiology of love and the destructive way love operates in human beings by means of a floral metaphor:

Love ('*ishq*) is derived from '*ashiqā*, a plant which appears in the garden from the root of a tree. First it strengthens its roots in the ground. Then it sprouts and entwines itself around the tree and spreads until it covers it entirely. It strangles the tree to such a degree that no moisture remains in the tree's veins. Any nourishment that the tree receives, the plant will plunder, until the tree dies.³¹

The wisdom in love's detrimental working is to achieve a perfect unity and to cut off any connection between the lover and the world. Anything other than love, including the lover and the beloved, is considered as an impediment to love's unity. As Aḥmad Ghazālī states: "(...)Love is the lover and love is the beloved and love is

³⁰ See Ibn 'Abbādī, *Ṣūfī-nāma*, p. 209, ll. 4-11; Muḥammad Mustamlī Bukhārī, *Sharḥ at-ta'arruf*, Vol. 4, p. 1389; *Khulāsa-yi sharḥ at-ta'arruf*, p. 347; Nagaurī, *Lawā'ih*, pp. 13-4; Zangī, *Nuzhat al-'āshiqīn*, p. 138; H. Gāzurgāhī, *Majālis al-'ushshāq*, p. 25; Aḥmad-i Jām Nāmiqī, *Uns at-tā'bīn*, pp. 211-12.

³¹ *Mū'nis al-'ushshāq* in *Oeuvres Philosophiques et Mystiques*, Vol. 3, par Seyyed Hossein Nasr et Henry Corbin, Teheran: Institut d'Etudes et des Recherches Culturelles, 1993, p. 287. Sayf ad-Dīn Bākharzī (d. 659/1261) employs the same metaphor, stating that the verse "He who loves" means any tree of (one's) nature which is entwined with '*ashiqā-yi 'ishq*, the creeper of love." See *Du risāla-yi 'irfānī dar 'ishq*, ed. I. Afshar, Teheran: Manūchihri, 1359, pp. 99-100.

love because the lover and the beloved are derived from love. When the impediments (i.e. “-r” in lover and “be-d” in the beloved) are removed, love returns again to its own reality of oneness.”³²

Nizāmī combines this ruinous aspect of love with the ascetic practice of denying oneself food. No mention is made of Majnūn’s eating in the early chapters of the story. Signs of Majnūn’s vegetarianism appear from chapter 32, in which he saves a herd of gazelles by ransoming them from a hunter. In this scene, he delivers a speech on the innocence of the animals to persuade the hunter to release them. He identifies people who kill animals with wolves and refers to the beauty of gazelles. He advises the hunter not to consume flesh:

He said: “According to the codes of hunters,
I am your guest for all that you have hunted.
Remove the snare from the heads of the gazelles;
release these frightened beasts.
Why do you deprive these fleeing beasts of their lives?
every single creature has a soul.
Such nice eyes and rumps
upon both of which are written ‘incur not Your wrath.’”³³
How can your heart consent to the use of violence,
shedding the blood of two or three innocent creatures?
Such a person is not a human being but rather a wolf;
to kill a gazelle is a great sin. (. . .)
That [white] chest, which is envied even by pure silver,
is not suitable for fire and roasted meat (*kabāb*).
That bare rump, which is cosseted,
you know that it is not fit to be wounded.
And that bag, which contains pure musk,
what honour is it to butcher it?
And do you not know that the elegant reed-like thigh
is not suited to be tortured,
And that back, which cannot bear the burden of anyone,
will be hurt if you cast it down.
(ll. 10–15, 21–25)

When the hunter hears these words, he agrees to free the animals on the condition that Majnūn gives him something in return. Majnūn instantly dismounts from his horse and offers it to the hunter. Then Majnūn removes the lasso from the beasts and kisses the black eyes of a small gazelle, which reminds him of the eyes of his beloved. The narrator assures the reader that Majnūn did not kiss the gazelle

³² *Sawānīh*, p. 18, *faṣl* 4 (10), ll. 62–3.

³³ The Koran 1:7.

out of despair (*afsūs*) but rather out of love (*dūstā*): "Although these eyes are not the eyes of the beloved / they are a memory of those black eyes." (l. 35)

Majnūn's vegetarianism is developed further in chapter 49, in which he opens a debate on vegetarianism with his uncle, Salīm-i 'Āmirī. Salīm brings Majnūn food and clothing and insists that he should wear the clothes and eat the food. Majnūn eschews both. He tells his uncle that he feeds on love and on the beloved's scent, adding that he occasionally eats the gum and leaves of trees:

Salīm asked: "O heart-burned one,
what do you eat day and night?
Man's subsistence depends on food,
what is your food, if you are a human being?"
Majnūn answered: "O you whose name is 'sound' (*salīm*) like my heart,
the thought of my sound health (*salāmatam*) be your greeting (*salām*).
To be honest with you, I receive the nourishment
of my heart from the morning breeze.
My body is withered by abstaining from food
my capacity to eat has gone.
Each breeze, which brings the scent of the beloved,
undoubtedly inspires me with life. (. . .)
Since I am getting thin due to hunger,
I scratch gum from trees.
This gum or some other plants are my food,
which I consume not once a week but once a month.
I have eliminated my appetite for other food,
I have no need for other nourishment.
My gullet cannot stomach bread,
and even if I try to swallow it, my throat aches.
Although I am so emaciated,
I have no need for food."

(ll. 27-32, 34-38)

With these words Majnūn easily persuades his uncle that he cannot accept any meat or clothing from him. The chapter ends with a comment by Salīm in favour of vegetarianism and against other foods, using the metaphor of the bird, the seed and the trap:

The seeds of daily life have attracted
many a fowl into a trap.
He, who is more attracted to the seeds,
suffers more and is more disposed to the dangers of life.
Everyone who is content with plants
is a king in his own world.

(ll. 43-5)

This Neoplatonic bird imagery is popular with Persian poets including Nizāmī.³⁴ The bird stands for the soul, which is attracted by the seeds of worldly interests. As long as the bird is attracted by and feeds on these seeds, it remains in the trap. The only way to free itself from the cage is to refrain from eating. This is one of the many metaphors Nizāmī uses to show the importance of the soul's emancipation. To deliberately deny oneself food is the key to the cage. The emaciated lover is one of the *sabuk-bārān*, 'those who are light of burden,' and thus ready to be united with the beloved. The body is regarded as a burden, preventing the traveller from moving rapidly to the station of union, i.e. annihilation in the beloved. Love helps the lover to lighten this burden by causing sleeplessness, lack of appetite and continual contemplation of the beloved. Mystics such as Aḥmad Ghazālī and 'Abdullāh Anṣārī depict love as a cannibal (*mardum-khār*), feeding on the lover's being to remove any barrier to absolute oneness (*tauḥīd*).³⁵ In the seventh discourse of *Makhzan al-asrār*, Nizāmī observes:

It is better to be weak in this meadow,
a fat gazelle cannot keep pace with a lean one.
Since you are the phoenix, be the glory of [God's] work
eat little, say little and harm no one.

Asceticism and abstaining from food are highlighted again in chapter 54, in the encounter between Majnūn and Salām of Baghdad. Salām is delighted to be accepted by Majnūn as his companion. As a token of love and friendship, he wants to share his food with him:

He said: "Open your frown to me;
break a loaf as a token of friendship with me.
Although your refusing food is pleasant for the soul,
you should accept one or two bites.
Although a man is man by virtue of his nature,
he receives the power of his body by food.
(ll. 64-6)

Majnūn immediately answers him:

"I am exempted from this accounting,
I have passed the stage of those who eat.

³⁴ Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī's treatise, *'Aql-i surkh*, is an elaborate metaphorical description of the imprisonment of the bird-soul in the trap of the world.

³⁵ See *Sawānīh*, p. 55, *fasl* 35, l. 2; Anṣārī, *Risāla-yi dil u jān*, in *Sukhanān-i pīr-i Harāt*, p. 5. Here in rhyming prose, Anṣārī says: *'ishq mardum-khār ast bī 'ishq mardum khār ast*, 'Love feeds on people: without love, the people are wretched.'

The power of people who fear for their own existence
depends on bread and sweat-meat.

Since my nature is pure,
how could not eating cause my perdition?"

(ll. 67-9)

Here, Majnūn points to the obliteration of his lower soul (*nafs*). He has almost achieved his goal and has no need to eat earthly things; he considers hunger as a divine grace. There are numerous stories about Sufis who avoided eating and fed on the words of the divine beloved, i.e. the Koran. Although he has experienced love and knows the twists and turns of being a lover, Salām cannot stay long with Majnūn. Through the episode of Majnūn and Salām, Nizāmī draws a sharp contrast between profane love and an absolutely spiritual love. The former depends on earthly phenomena such as sleeping, eating, socialisation, etc., whereas heavenly love is free from such phenomena. Salām alienates himself from people to follow the example of Majnūn, but since he eats and sleeps, he cannot keep pace with Majnūn. As soon as his store of food runs out, he sees no recourse but to leave Majnūn:

When the table was emptied of food,
the guest was impelled to bid farewell.
Because of his shortcomings, he said farewell
leaving him behind amongst his beasts.

(ll. 111-12)

Majnūn's refusal to consume meat also relates to his association with animals. In Sufism, living with animals is a clear sign of controlling one's lower soul. This can be seen in 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkira*, in which mystics such as Rābi'a and Mālik Dīnār deny themselves meat and associate harmoniously with animals. In fact, in chapter 43:13, Majnūn's wandering in the desert is directly compared to Rābi'a: "Majnūn said this, and departed from that path / like Rābi'a, he wandered the highways and byways." By eschewing meat like Rābi'a, Majnūn is able to develop a close relationship with wild beasts. First, he uses them to make people keep their distance, so that he can meditate on his beloved without being disturbed. Secondly, as Majnūn tells Laylī in chapter 53, they serve as his sentinels and remind him of the dogs of Laylī's alley:

You (Laylī) have a heart like a dog while the one watching for you
is dog-faced;

I am the dust on the road of your alley's dogs.

I sit beside your dogs because

I will always choose to be your dog-keeper.
 This means, these wild beasts behind me
 are sharp clawed dogs [protecting me].
 (ll. 41-3)

By associating Majnūn closely with plants, Nizāmī paved the way for his imitators to present Majnūn as a lover of plants. To give two examples, in Persian the willow tree is named after Majnūn, *bīd-i Majnūn*: the earliest reference to this is in a quatrain attributed to Abū Sa'īd.³⁶ Moreover, in his version of *Laylī and Majnūn*, Hātifī presents the most peculiar idea that Majnūn is the reason why the cypress tree is called *sarw-i āzād*, 'the free cypress.' In his romance, when Majnūn is roaming the desert with bare feet in winter snow and ice, he sees a gardener about to cut down a cypress tree. Majnūn runs to him and ransoms the tree. Hātifī adds that since this time the cypress has been called 'Free.'³⁷

3. *Rejecting clothing*

There are references to Majnūn's nakedness at several points in the poem.³⁸ In chapter 18 we see Majnūn's aversion to clothing, as resembling a 'grave-cloth' (*kafan*):

He stretched his hand and tore his clothing, saying:
 "what has this dead man to do with a shroud?"
 He who sets his throne outside the two worlds,
 how can he be contained in a garment?
 (chapter 18, 2-3)

These couplets can be interpreted in at least two ways: firstly, Majnūn is apparently alluding here to the famous tradition in which God says: "Heaven and earth contain Me not, but the heart of my faithful servant contains Me." Secondly, by tearing his robe from his body, Majnūn makes a sharp distinction between his corporal body and his immaterial soul. He considers his body as a dead thing wrapped in a shroud. Majnūn is, in fact, expressing a Sufi view of clothing. Not only did Sufis consider the body as a veil, clothing

³⁶ *Sukhanān-i manzūm-i Abū Sa'īd*, p. 64, p. 436.

³⁷ See Hātifī, *Laylī u Majnūn*, pp. 84-5, ll. 1655-673; also see Jamī's *Laylī and Majnūn* in which Majnūn is portrayed as a vegetarian. See *Mathnawī-yi haft aurang*, pp. 832-34, and 837.

³⁸ See chapters 17:4; 18: 6,7,10 and the lines cited; 21:23; and 37:42.

was also generally regarded as a veil separating the mystic from the beloved.³⁹ There are several traditions promoting nakedness. For example, Hujwīrī cites the following tradition: "Keep your stomachs hungry, your livers thirsty, your bodies naked so that you may see the Elevated God in your hearts."⁴⁰ In another place, Hujwīrī continues: "Know that the existence of humanity (*ādamiyya*) is the veil of divinity (*rubūbiyya*) and the veil cannot be eradicated except by the cycle of states (*aḥwāl*) and training to attain stations (*maqāmāt*). Such an annihilation is called purity (*ṣafā'*) and it is impossible for him who has the attribute of annihilation to wear clothing."⁴¹ Likewise, the *Risāla-yi Qushayriyya* contains several references to nakedness. When the mystic Abū Sa'īd is asked: "How have you achieved your station?" He answers: "By means of a hungry stomach and a naked body."⁴² Abū Sa'īd considers clothing as the covering of the corrupted heart.⁴³ In *Sharḥ-i ta'arruf*, Bukhārī makes several references to nakedness. According to him, mystics keep their bodies naked so that they cannot sleep because of cold or heat, and pray constantly to God.⁴⁴ In *Asrār at-tauḥīd*, it is reported that when people asked the mystic Bishr b. al-Ḥārith al-Ḥāfi (d. 227/841) why he never wears footwear, he cited a Koranic verse (71:19) "'He has made the earth a vast expanse for you.' The earth is God's vast expanse and it is not meet to walk on His ground with shoes and footwear." 'Aṭṭār adds: "He (Bishr) walked all his life on bare feet and therefore he was called Ḥāfi, 'the barefooted.'"⁴⁵

Since dress was a mark of asceticism, mystic writers devoted special chapters to the kind of clothing the Sufi was permitted to wear.⁴⁶ Based on austere ascetic practices, Sufis from the early centuries

³⁹ For various references to mystics' views of clothing see A.T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*, pp. 14, 18, 71.

⁴⁰ Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 419. In chapter five of his *Risāla*, Qushayrī also deals with the discipline of the *nafs*. See also Najm ad-Dīn Dāya, *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, in which the author deals with the *nafs* in the fourth part, pp. 343–407; English trans., pp. 334–93.

⁴¹ Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 54.

⁴² *Tarjuma-yi risāla-yi Qushayriyya*, p. 38. Qushayrī reports that the eminent mystic Ma'rūf even asked in his will that no shroud should be put around him (p. 30).

⁴³ *Sukhanān-i manzūm-i Abū Sa'īd*, p. 40, q. 274. "You have adorned your outward form with clothing; what benefit does it yield to have corrupt hearts and pure clothing?"

⁴⁴ *Sharḥ at-ta'arruf*, Vol. 1, p. 129; also see p. 209.

⁴⁵ *Asrār at-tauḥīd*, Vol. 1, p. 22; also see 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 112.

⁴⁶ Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, pp. 49–65; Kāshānī, *Miṣbāḥ al-hidāya*, pp. 147–50.

eschewed fine clothes. They usually wore coarse woollen (*ṣūf*) shreds and patches (*muraqqa'*), whence they received the name Sufi, literally meaning 'of wool.' Certain groups of mystics, especially *Malāmatīs* and *Qalandarīs* avoided wearing much clothing. The most well known mystic poet who avoided wearing any clothing was Bābā Ṭāhir, nicknamed the Naked, a figure resembling Majnūn in many respects. It is said that he roamed the desert and mountains in the hot summers and the cold winters naked, singing love poems and bemoaning man's insignificance.

Nizāmī follows the same line of thought in his works, especially in *Laylī and Majnūn*, where he depicts Majnūn as not wearing any clothing. In chapter 23:19, after Majnūn has explained his grief to his father, it is said: "In one corner his father sat weeping / in another corner Majnūn had fallen down naked." In chapter 27, when Naufal promises Majnūn to unite him with Laylī, he asks Majnūn in return to take a bath and to wear clothing, to which Majnūn responds positively:

He went to the bath and put on clothes;
he grew calm and drank wine.
In line with Arab tradition, he put on a turban,
and sat with Naufal to drink and to listen to music.
He sang a number of gentle love lyrics
on the beauty of his sweetheart.
(ll. 79-81)

A sketchy description of Majnūn's nakedness is given in chapter 39, in which Majnūn meets his father, where Majnūn is compared to the people on day of resurrection. The degree of Majnūn's nakedness is not explicitly specified: in miniature paintings based on Nizāmī's text, Majnūn usually wears a simple blue loincloth:

As 'Āmirī ceased to weep,
he looked at Majnūn from top to toe.
He saw him like the naked souls on the day of resurrection,
both his frame and his head were unclothed.
Out of his leather sack, he pulled an elegant robe
and dressed him from top to toe.
He covered his body with clothing,
put shoes on his feet and a turban on his head.
(ll. 38-41)

In chapter 49:21-22, when Majnūn's uncle Salīm visits Majnūn and finds him naked, he offers Majnūn clothes. At first Majnūn resists wearing them, but on his uncle's insistence, he accepts. However,

Majnūn said: "My body is far from clothing,
 my body is a fierce fire and the clothing an odour.
 Imagine that I have looked at them,
 and that I have worn them and then tear them apart again."

Here Majnūn considers his body as a fire burning anything close to it. In other words, the fire of love has reached his whole body, making him renounce any material object.

4. *Avoiding speech*

Majnūn's avoidance of speech or his 'silence' (*khāmūshī*) is another aspect of his character that corresponds closely to the ascetic and ethical method of disciplining the *nafs* and avoiding the phenomenal world. In *Makhzan al-asrār*, Niẓāmī praises silence, in a debate between a falcon and a nightingale. When the nightingale complains that he has to feed on worms and live on the top of a thorn despite his sweet melody, the falcon answers that he has attained his exalted place at the hand of the king by accomplishing a hundred tasks but not speaking about any of them.⁴⁷ *Khāmūshī* also reveals one of the important aspects of a lover, who is contrasted to a *mudda'ī*, a 'claimant' or 'pretender,' personified by Iblīs, who is extremely grandiloquent. It is worth mentioning here that Iblīs entered Adam's being through the opening of his mouth.⁴⁸ Mystical theorists devote chapters to elucidating the significance of silence and the dangers of the tongue.⁴⁹ The ascetic contrives extreme measures to remain silent. Using many traditions and every possible metaphor, theorists advise people to keep silent. For instance, it is reported that Abū Bakr, the first Caliph, put a stone in his mouth for a number of years to avoid talking.⁵⁰ On the authority of 'Alī b. Bakkār, it is related that God created for everything else two doors, but four doors for the tongue: two lips and two rows of teeth.⁵¹ Another mystic says that man was given two ears and two eyes but one mouth, so that he would hear and see more than he speaks. The tongue is compared to a wild beast,

⁴⁷ *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, pp. 177-8.

⁴⁸ Dāya, *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, p. 75, English trans., pp. 103-04.

⁴⁹ See Ghazālī, *Kīmīyā*, Vol. 2, pp. 63-105; *Tarjuma-yi risāla-yi Qushayrīyya*, pp. 181-88.

⁵⁰ *Tarjuma-yi risāla-yi Qushayrīyya*, p. 185, *Kīmīyā*, Vol. 2, p. 66.

⁵¹ *Tarjuma-yi risāla-yi Qushayrīyya*, p. 185.

which should be kept in the mouth because if it is released, it may cause man's death.⁵² Moreover, the following tradition from Jesus is often cited: "Worship consists of ten parts; nine parts are silence and the tenth is to flee from mankind."⁵³ In the following extract, the great mystic Abū 'l-Ḥasan Kharāqānī shows the importance of disciplining one's verbal faculty:

The Shaykh said: "The effort of the brave adepts (*jahd-i mardān*) lasts forty years. They must exert themselves ten years to put their tongue on the right course, and the tongue will not enter on a right course [in a period of] less than ten years. They must exert themselves for ten years to be rid of the fat, which has grown upon their body. And ten years are needed for the tongue to be harmonised with the heart. For whoever has walked the path for forty years in this way, there is hope that a sound may come out of his throat, which is free from carnal desires."⁵⁴

Abū Yazīd of Bisṭām is reported to have said: "For forty years I have not spoken to people. Whenever I have said something, I have said it to the Truth and whenever I have heard something, I have heard it from the Truth."⁵⁵ In a couplet cited in *'Abhar al-āshiqīn*, Rūzbihān Baqlī states that "there is a secret hidden from man's spiritual aspiration (*himma*): those whom this secret is revealed have their tongues cut off."⁵⁶ Generally speaking, the Sufi's attitude towards the tongue is negative. Rūmī, an eloquent mystic poet, chose 'the Silent One' (*Khāmūsh*) as his *nom de plume*. Sufis often relate the activities of the tongue to the heart through a myriad of similes. Thus Abū 'l-Ḥasan Kharāqānī states: "He whose tongue speaks about everything (*parākanda*) has a disquieted heart. Great men have said: 'The heart is a cauldron and the tongue a spoon. Whatever is in the cauldron comes into the spoon.' The heart is an ocean and the tongue its coast. As the ocean waves, it will throw on the coast whatever it contains."⁵⁷ Mustamlī Bukhārī calls Sufis who chose silence *sukūt naẓẓār*, 'the Silent Onlookers.' He maintains that the Sufis are present amongst people with their bodies but they are absent from them with the heart.⁵⁸ To speak about anything other than the object of

⁵² Ibid., p. 187.

⁵³ *Ḳīmīyā*, Vol. 2, pp. 65–66.

⁵⁴ *Nūr al-ʿulūm* in J.E. Bertel's *Taṣawwuf*, p. 343.

⁵⁵ *Sharḥ at-taʿarruf*, Vol. 1, p. 84.

⁵⁶ *'Abhar al-āshiqīn*, p. 78, l. 16.

⁵⁷ *Nūr al-ʿulūm* in J.E. Bertel's *Taṣawwuf*, p. 337.

⁵⁸ *Sharḥ at-taʿarruf*, Vol. 1, pp. 82–3.

love is considered a lack of concentration on the part of the heart. Majnūn's silence is a sign of his concentration on and absorption in his beloved: when he does speak, he talks only about Laylī.

Although there are short references to Majnūn's avoidance of speech in the Arabic sources, no ascetic connotation can be detected there. This aspect was apparently inaugurated by Persian poets such as 'Aṭṭār, Sanā'ī and, of course, Nizāmī. Majnūn's silence is often used to show his utter concentration on his beloved as well as the obliteration of his ego in the object of his love. True remembrance of the beloved is only possible when the lover's ego is completely eradicated. In *Ilāhī-nāma*, in which 'Aṭṭār relates a story about Majnūn's concentration on Laylī's name, he concludes:⁵⁹

If you remember your own absorption (*gum būdan*, lit. 'be lost')
it is then right to mention her.

However, when you recollect her while you have the barricade
of your own self (*khudī*), in front of you, you are recollecting yourself.⁶⁰

Majnūn's silence has multiple functions. It is a sign of Majnūn's ascetic behaviour, and a clear sign of his love for Laylī. It also shows Majnūn's Sufi discipline, in the contemplation of his beloved.

In Nizāmī's poem, there are several explicit allusions to Majnūn's disinclination to talk to anyone. In chapter 20:48–9, when a passer-by notices Majnūn and wants to talk to him, Majnūn avoids speaking:

He asks him about this and that
but he receives nothing save silence.
Giving up hope of communicating with him,
he passes him by and goes on his way.

When people desire to talk to him, they may trick him into speech, by talking about Laylī. Naufal does this in chapter 27, and so does Salām of Baghdād when he visits Majnūn in chapter 63.

⁵⁹ Nizāmī knits silence onto Majnūn's character in such a splendid way that it has become proverbial in Persian. A couplet from Sa'dī, influenced by Nizāmī, has become a proverb in Persian: *har ān 'āqil ki bā Majnūn nishīnad / nabāyad kardanash juz dhikr-i Laylī*, "Any wise person who sits with Majnūn / should not speak to him, except to remember Laylī." Sa'dī, *Gulistān*, p. 185, l. 11. Another poet, Khājū Kirmānī, dwells on the same topic in his *Dīwān*, p. 223.

⁶⁰ *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 123, ll. 3–4.

5. *Sleep deprivation*

Sleeplessness is another aspect of Majnūn's character which highlights both his lovesickness and his asceticism. Lovers have an especial connection to night in Persian poetry. 'Aṭṭār tells several stories emphasising the necessity of sleep deprivation for the lover. For example, he tells of a lover who falls asleep: the beloved comes to his side and, finding him in sleep, places a letter in his sleeve and goes away. When the lover wakes up, he sees the letter upon which is written:

And if you are an ascetic, be awake at night
 be a servant and serve [the Beloved] until dawn.
 And if you are a lover, be shameful:
 what does sleep have to do with the eyes of the lover?
 O benighted person, since you are neither this nor that
 do not boast with lying words of our love.
 If the lover sleeps, except in his grave-cloth (*kāfan*),
 I may call him lover, but a lover of himself.⁶¹

The lover should be like an alert watchman: one moment of neglect, and the thieves may steal the heart. Aḥmad-i Jām Nāmiqī takes the fire of love as the chief reason for the lover's inability to sleep.⁶² Nāgaurī states that when the watcher (*raqīb*) sleeps, the lover's joy appears because then he can go to meet the beloved.⁶³ Khalīl Shirwānī devotes two sections to the lover's complaint of the short duration of the night of union, and the lover's sleeplessness.⁶⁴ All the doors are shut at night, except the doors of lovers, so that they can walk around the house of their sweethearts.⁶⁵ Abū Sa'īd says that the lover's sleeplessness is because he fears that he may reveal the secret of the beloved during his sleep.⁶⁶ In another poem Abū Sa'īd states: "There is water in my eyes instead of sleep, / because I am in haste to see you // People say, "Sleep, so that you may see her in your dream;" /

⁶¹ *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, pp. 196-97, ll. 3520-3530; the lines quoted here are 3525-29.

⁶² *Uns al-tā'ibīn*, p. 37. The author connects the lover's sleeplessness to the sleep of ignorance (*khāb-i ghaflat*) by stating that the fire of love keeps the lover awake out of such a sleep.

⁶³ *Lawā'ih*, p. 101.

⁶⁴ See *Nuzhat al-majālis*, (1366) pp. 502-03 and 578-81, (1375) pp. 565-66, and pp. 648-51, qq. 3215-24, qq. 3844-3867.

⁶⁵ *Nuzhat al-majālis*, (1366) p. 205, (1375) p. 245, q. 736.

⁶⁶ *Sukhanān-i manẓūm-i Abū Sa'īd*, p. 22, q. 152. The lover's sleeplessness is elaborated by Nāgaurī, *Lawā'ih*, pp. 70-1.

O ignorant persons, there is no place for sleep here."⁶⁷ Najm ad-Dīn Dāya refers to another reason for the mystic's unwillingness to sleep. In his view, man originally belongs to another world. During the day he sees things in this world, he is distracted and forgets his home, whereas during the night he dreams of his primordial abode and starts to weep and lament.⁶⁸ Rūzbihān mentions the prophet Yūnus, who wept so much his eyes were blinded.⁶⁹ Moreover, mystics were sometimes accused of drunkenness because of their red eyes.⁷⁰

The vigil is one of the important ascetic practices of mystics.⁷¹ The mystic's vigils resemble the lover's sleeplessness, but where the mystic avoids sleep deliberately, the lover's sleeplessness is caused by love. In Sufism, there are extreme forms of vigils. The most famous account in 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkira* is a story about Shāh Shujā' of Kirmān, who avoided sleep for forty years. Whenever sleepiness came upon him, he would pour salt in his eyes to remain awake.⁷² Nizāmī pays particular attention to sleeplessness, not only in the character of Majnūn, but also in his other poems. In *Makhzan al-asrār*, Nizāmī condemns sleep by means of the tale of a fox and a greengrocer. In this tale, when the fox falls asleep, it is seized by a wolfish thief. Nizāmī concludes: "He, who makes of this road (world) a sleeping place, looses either his head or his crown."⁷³ In the case of Majnūn, it is hard to say whether Majnūn avoids sleep deliberately, like an ascetic, or is compelled to remain awake because by his lovesickness. At the beginning of their love affair in chapter seventeen, Majnūn spends his nights in and around Laylī's quarter. In chapter 14:41,46, he is compared to a candle:

⁶⁷ *Sukhanān-i manzūm-i Abū Sa'īd*, p. 3, q. 14.

⁶⁸ *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, p. 106, English trans., p. 128; also see part 3, chapter 16, pp. 289–92, English trans., pp. 286–90.

⁶⁹ *Sharḥ-i shathīyyāt*, p. 258.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁷¹ A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 114–15; also see *Miṣbāḥ al-hidāya*, pp. 281–83; *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, p. 287; English trans., p. 284.

⁷² *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 327; Kirmānī's account occurs in Hujwiri's *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 174. *Tarjuma-yi risāla-yi Qushirīyya*, p. 71, also mentions that Abū Bakr Dulaf b. Jahdar ash-Shiblī poured salt in his eyes to avoid sleeping. In *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, 'Aṭṭār tells a story about Shiblī who, asked why he pours salt in his eyes, says: "He who sleeps is negligent (*ghāfil*) and a negligent person is veiled." (p. 538).

⁷³ *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 116. In this context, crown symbolises material possessions.

Like a candle, he abandoned sleep
restless, he did not sleep by night or day. (. . .)
Because of the separation, he sang couplets every night,
hiding himself in the alley of the beloved.

6. *Majnūn's alienation from human society*

An important aspect of asceticism and of Majnūn's character is alienation from mankind. M.W. Dols has given a negative interpretation of this essential trait of Majnūn. In comparing Nizāmī's depiction of Majnūn's madness with the early Arabic sources, Dols bases his analysis on the ways in which Majnūn violates social norms. In his view, Majnūn is the "negator of Muslim social values."⁷⁴ He makes a sharp contrast between Majnūn and the 'good Muslim':

His popular name, Majnūn, was itself a denial of his family identity. In general, man's natural state was among his fellow men; a good Muslim was expected to marry, have children, and lead a life fully integrated into society. Conversely, Majnūn's withdrawal was an expression of his rejection of society and his own humanity. His renunciation of the world was not that of the ascetic whose purpose was self-control. Nor was Majnūn's goal the Sufi one of self-annihilation in the beloved but separation from his beloved (. . .).⁷⁵

Here Dols follows J. Scott Meisami's interpretation of Majnūn's character. Meisami rejects the idea that Majnūn seeks perfection in isolation:

Majnūn becomes increasingly alienated from his fellow men, and his flights into the desert, where he wanders naked among the wild beasts, grow more and more protracted, as he comes to prefer his isolated state. While Romantically inclined critics see in Majnūn a rebel against the constricting values of society, Nizāmī's judgement of his moral condition is quite otherwise; we may fruitfully recall Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī's dictum that one cannot seek perfection in isolation.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ M.W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman*, p. 335.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁷⁶ J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 160; see also p. 172 where J. Scott Meisami rejects Majnūn's life-style and quotes in note 40 Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī: "Men farthest from virtue are those who part from civilized life and sociability and incline to solitude and loneliness. Thus, the virtue of Love and Friendship is the greatest of virtues, and its preservation is the most important of tasks."

Her view has, however, been challenged by A.L.F.A. Beelaert, who argues that "it is not at all self-evident that the ethical ideas of Naṣīr ad-Dīn, who was born around the time Niẓāmī died, can be projected *tel quel* onto Niẓāmī's *mathnawī*."⁷⁷ Isolation, or to be more precise, retreat from the community of men is one of the essential aspects of the lover frequently referred to in love poetry. As mentioned earlier, Niẓāmī himself chose a solitary life and repeatedly advises the reader to follow his example. Niẓāmī's Majnūn decides to leave human society, rather than being rejected by his own community. On the contrary, his father, mother and uncle frequently come to see him with the intention of persuading him to return home. But even when persons such as Salām of Baghdād desire to stay with him, Majnūn prefers to be alone.

As regards M.W. Dols' view that marriage is a sign of a good Muslim, it has no value with respect to Islamic mysticism. Many mystics led a celibate life and regarded marriage as an obstacle to serving the beloved. In fact, they often said that one heart could love only one beloved. The mystic woman Rābi'a, whom Niẓāmī compares Majnūn to, avoided marriage and maintained celibacy.⁷⁸

The early mystics often abandoned all human society, roaming the desert and living in ruined places or caves.⁷⁹ To abandon people and to lead a solitary life were among the popular topics discussed in both ethical and mystical treatises. Muḥammad Ghazālī, who like Niẓāmī chose a secluded life, devotes a long chapter to reclusive life in which he enumerates six beneficial and six harmful aspects of such a life.⁸⁰ In his view, a solitary life provides man with the opportunity to invoke God in such a way that one becomes unaware of oneself; it withholds man from sin (*ma'siya*); it prevents man from succumbing to temptation (*fitna*); it releases man from people's malice (*sharr*); it cuts man off from people's cupidity (*ṭama'*); and it frees man from seeing ignoramuses and stupid people (*girānān u aḥmaqān*). The six plagues stemming from solitary life are that man is hindered from learning and teaching; that he cannot help people or to receive help; that he cannot develop a nice disposition which is to be gained by association with people; that devilish thoughts

⁷⁷ The citation is from Beelaert's review on Meisami's *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 46, 1/2, Januari-Maart, 1989, p. 216.

⁷⁸ 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, pp. 71-2.

⁷⁹ For the symbolism of the cave in love poetry see *infra*, chapter 14:6, pp. 330-36.

⁸⁰ *Ḳimīyā*, Vol. 2, pp. 434-55.

may prevail in his mind, so that he may stop recollecting God's name; that he becomes deprived of the spiritual reward to be gained from visiting people, participating in burial ceremonies, etc; and that association with people is a sort of humility and solitude is a kind of arrogance. Ghazālī concludes that man should train his lower soul by leading a solitary life. Hujwīrī states that the ascetic's goal of retreating from people must spring out of one's desire for the well being (*salāma*) of people he may maltreat. He must not think of his own well-being.⁸¹ Najm ad-Dīn Dāya observes: "Know that the foundation of the spiritual journey (*sulūk*) on the path of religion and the attainment of the station of certainty are based on solitude (*khalwa*), self-seclusion (*'uzla*), and withdrawal from people."⁸² In his *Tadhkira*, 'Aṭṭār gives accounts of numerous mystics who advise their disciples to avoid people. For instance, one person dreams of Bāyazīd of Bisṭām and asks him (in his dream) to give him advice. Bāyazīd says to him: "People are a shoreless ocean, to be afar from them is a boat. Try to embark on this boat and to save your wretched body from this ocean."⁸³ Again 'Aṭṭār reports from Abū Bakr Shiblī that "association with mankind is a failure (*iflās*)."⁸⁴ Another mystic, Yaḥyā Ma'ādh Rāzī, is reported to have said: "Solitude is the desire of the faithful (*siddīqān*) and to associate with people is their dread."⁸⁵

To live in solitude (*tanhā'ī*) and to be a stranger (*bīgāna*) are essential attributes of the lover in the books of love theory. For instance, Jamāl Khalīl Shirwānī devotes a section to loneliness in *Nuzhat al-majālis*, delineating the states and condition of the separated lover.⁸⁶ A true lover is extremely lonely and this loneliness goes so far that he cannot even trust the parts of his body. His rational faculty is shut down by love; his eyes, his pale colour and his sighs become the telltales betraying all his feelings. His heart functions on its own, and he loses his control over it. Although sometimes the lover tries

⁸¹ *Kashf al-asrār*, pp. 153-54.

⁸² *Mirsād al-'ibād*, p. 281; English trans., p. 279.

⁸³ *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 181.

⁸⁴ *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 551. "It is reported that when Ibrāhīm Khawāss journeyed in a desert with one of his disciples, the roar of a lion arose and the disciple turned pale and jumped in a tree. He remained there trembling. Ibrāhīm stood still, spread his prayer mat and started to perform his prayer. The lion approached him and saw that he was performing a special devotion. It fixed its eyes upon him, gazing at him till dawn while Ibrāhīm was occupied with his prayer." See *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 523.

⁸⁵ *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 316.

⁸⁶ *Nuzhat al-majālis*, (1366) pp. 570-72, (1375) pp. 639-40; qq. 3779-90.

to console himself by complaining about the beloved's cruelty to his own heart, the heart may initially listen but then disappoints him by either choosing the side of the beloved or looking for another beloved for itself. The lover finds himself often in a quandary: if he conceals his love, sorrow will kill him and if he reveals it, people will kill him.⁸⁷ The lover's only companions are the beloved's sorrow, the pain in his heart and his own shadow.

Solitude has a positive side as well. As Aḥmad Ghazālī repeats several times in the *Sawānīḥ*, the lover chants: "In your love, [even] my loneliness is too much."⁸⁸ The author adds that when the awareness of being alone becomes crowded in the lover's mind, this is a sign of love's perfection. In other words, the lover achieves perfect oneness (*tauḥīd*) at the moment that he feels that even loneliness intrudes on his being. Isolation is needed to show one's devotion to love. In this connection, 'Aṭṭār recounts a story about Majnūn in *Muṣibat-nāma*:⁸⁹ when Majnūn roams the town day and night in humiliation, someone tells Laylī that he does so because of the pain caused by his love for her. Acting as an archetype of the cruel beloved, Laylī answers: "If he is firm in love, what is he doing, remaining in the town for a single moment?" When these words reach Majnūn, he rushes weeping to the desert.

The lover is referred to as a stranger in both lyrical and theoretical texts. With regard to this quality of the lover, Aḥmad Jām Nāmiqī compares the lover to a stranger by alluding to the Koranic verse (2:18). He says: "In the same way that strangers (*biḡānagān*) are deaf, dumb and blind concerning their rights, the lovers are deaf, dumb and blind regarding the entire creation. They have nothing to do with anything except the beloved. Whatever hardship has befallen them is due to the pain of love. They are the 'fallen' (*uṣṭādagān*) due to their own pain."⁹⁰ The lover is a 'stranger in a strange land', wherever he may be, as in these lines:

I have a passion in my head like the leopard on the mountain;
grief heaps on grief like stones on the mountain:
Far from my own homeland, fated to suffer exile,
like a lion in the ocean or a whale on the mountain.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Ibid., (1366) p. 207, (1375) p. 247, q. 757.

⁸⁸ *Sawānīḥ*, p. 11, *faṣl* 3 (4), l. 36; p. 43, *faṣl* 23 (3), l. 16; p. 61, *faṣl* 39 (3), l. 26.

⁸⁹ 'Aṭṭār, *Muṣibat-nāma*, pp. 69–70.

⁹⁰ *Uns at-tā'ibīn*, p. 218.

⁹¹ *Sukhanān-i manzūm-i Abū Sa'īd*, p. 88, q. 602.

To complain of his homelessness (*āwāragī*) and exile, the lover compares his state to the beloved's attribute of *har-jā'i*, 'going everywhere and associating with everyone'.⁹²

Your love takes me continuously from place to place,
wandering like your heart from one thought to another, O idol,
You are like a red rose (*gul*) passed from one hand to another
[while] I am like the mud (*gil*) of the road, trampled by every foot.⁹³

By emphasising Majnūn's solitary state, Niẓāmī adds an ascetic aspect to his character. Majnūn's alienation from people, eating habits, sleeplessness and refraining from speech correspond entirely to the Sufi's life-style; Majnūn's life is attuned to the medieval picture of mystics wandering the desert. Because of Majnūn's extreme ascetic discipline, his love can easily be interpreted as mystical love. Yet while Niẓāmī demonstrates both the ascetic and insane aspects of Majnūn's character, the emphasis is on Majnūn the lover. Niẓāmī adds another dimension to Majnūn's asceticism by contrasting this trait with Majnūn's kingship, which is the subject of the next chapter.

⁹² Khalīl Shirwānī devotes a whole section to this trait in *Nuzhat al-majālis*, (1366) pp. 394-96, (1375) pp. 448-50, qq. 2334-2347; see also Amīr Husaynī Harawī's *Šī-nāma*, in which he devotes the tenth letter to this particular attribute of the beloved. *Mathnawīhā-yi 'irfānī*, ed. S.M. Turābī, pp. 163-65, ll. 479-518.

⁹³ *Nuzhat al-majālis*, (1366) p. 394, (1375) p. 448, q. 2336.

CHAPTER SIX

“THE KING OF LOVE”

*chūn tu rā bār dād bar dargāh
ārizū zū makhāh ū rā khāh*

*When he grants you an audience in his court,
Do not make a request to him, ask for himself.¹*

Majnūn's kingship and his bond with animals

Majnūn's kingship is synthesised with his alienation from the community of man and association with animals. By doing so, Niẓāmī shows how Majnūn's austere ascetic training is rewarded by his becoming a king, who in Persian culture is the shadow of God on earth. In early Arabic sources, there is no mention of Majnūn being a king. Niẓāmī presents Majnūn as both the 'king of love' (*shāh-i 'ishq*) and the 'king of the universe' (*shāh-i jahān*).

Majnūn's image as the king of love corresponds to the mystical portrait of Majnūn in Sufi writings, in which he is an adept in the discipline of love. In such writings, short episodes or aphorisms from the story of Majnūn are quoted to teach the mystical lover how to love. In chapter 54, in his conversation with Salām of Baghdād, Majnūn calls himself the king of love who has achieved this lofty rank by eliminating his 'lower soul' (*nafs*) and 'carnal desire' (*hawā'*):

I am the king of the kings of love
because of this glory (*jalāla*) not encumbered by the lower soul.
Having performed one pure ablution, I can no longer be soiled
by the passions to be found in earthly distractions.
I am emancipated from the corruption of the *nafs*;
I have broken the bazaar of my own *hawā'*.

(ll. 85-7)

Majnūn's image as the king of the universe compares him to the most popular monarchs of Perso-Islamic culture, such as Solomon

¹ *Abhar al-‘āshiqīn*, p. 106, l. 10.

and Kay Khusrau. This aspect of Majnūn's character is stressed as early as chapter fifteen, "On Majnūn's love." Here Majnūn is portrayed as a universal king and compared with a number of monarchs and lords:

The Sultan of the throne of those who rise at dawn;
 the commander of the army of those who shed tears.² (. . .)
 Kay Khusrau who is bereft of his crown and throne;
 the consoler of the hearts of hundreds of thousands of mendicants.
 The lord of the ants' army;³
 the reigning prince of the descendants of the wild ass (i.e. Bahrām).
 The tower of the castle of temptation;
 the watcher of the unguarded temple of the Magi.
 The alienated Majnūn who had a broken heart;
 the ocean that had not yet ceased to rage.
 (ll. 1-9)

Aside from this passage, in which Majnūn is presented as a universal ruler, there are numerous repetitive synonyms of 'king' such as *shāh*, *sultān*, *malik*, 'the leader of an army' (*sipahdār*) and 'master' (*khājā*), all alluding to Majnūn. Many of the attributes of the excerpt cited above are, in fact, flash-forward references to Majnūn which are elaborated later in the poem. From chapter 43 onwards, Majnūn is explicitly portrayed as a king. In this chapter, after having mourned the death of his father, Majnūn retreats to the wilderness, singing love poetry and so consoling his aching heart. The picture painted in this chapter is tranquil, a kind of paradisiacal gathering of birds, wild and tame beasts and Majnūn, all associating in perfect peace and harmony. The picture of Majnūn's kingship is probably inspired by the story of the mythical Iranian king Gayūmarth in Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma*, in which the entire animal kingdom is gathered around the throne of Gayūmarth.⁴ The chief difference between the court of Gayūmarth and that of Majnūn is that Majnūn has severed himself from mankind and lives a solitary life.

By adding the theme of kingship in the romance, Nizāmī finds a way not only to instruct his courtly audience but also to express his own view of love and kingship. Nizāmī conveys his view on these

² The second hemistich refers both to the 'Weepers' (*bakkā'ūn*) and to separated lovers.

³ The first hemistich refers to Solomon as well as to the wise king of the ants, who gives advice to Solomon in Koran commentaries.

⁴ *Shāh-nāma*, Vol. 1, pp. 21-2.

topics clearly in his other romances. Shīrīn gives up her monarchy for the sake of her love for Khusrau. Under the influence of love, Khusrau abandons his throne and devotes himself to learning and the hereafter. After his erotic escapades, Bahrām becomes more and more involved with other issues and leaves his seven domes, disappearing mysteriously into a cave. Finally, Alexander of Macedonia, having met Nūshāba, the queen of Barda', who rejects any kind of lust, retreats and sets out to search for the Fountain of Life. The king, in Nizāmī's works, must be the paragon of justice (*dād* or '*adāla*') because this is the only basis for the kingdom. The outcome of injustice (*bīdād*) is nothing save tears.⁵

Before commencing a discussion of Majnūn's kingship and his animal kingdom, I will quote the passage in which Majnūn is portrayed as a king in its entirety to give an impression of its beauty and to examine why M.W. Dols takes it as the "most forceful expression of Majnūn's insanity."⁶

He has shied away and has torn the rope;
he has cut off all his human dispositions.
Like the wild man, he has habituated himself to the desert
to the roots of green herbs.
He has neither the nature of the wild beasts nor of the tame ones,
yet he gets along with both wild and tame beasts.
To make people keep their distance,
he became the master of the lion and the deer.
Every wild animal that was in the desert
was eager to be at his service.
He has made a camp from lions, stags, wolves
and foxes along the road.
They all became servants at his command;
and he, like Solomon, was the king of them all.
The wing of the eagle was his parasol;
Majnūn's bones were under the shelter of the vulture.
His kingship reached so far that
he had eradicated wildness from the nature of the wild animals.
The wolf's power was reduced to that of the sheep;
the lion removed its claws from the onager.
Dogs made peace with hares;
the baby gazelle suckled the milk (*shīr*) of the lion (*shīr*).
Majnūn lived, holding his soul in his hand

⁵ *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 81, l. 4.

⁶ M.W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman*, p. 337.

and the beasts were lining up beside him.
 In the place where he slept,
 the fox swept its ground with its tail.
 The gazelle made eyes while running
 it drew its foot to its side.
 Majnūn leant back on the neck of the onager,
 using the stag's thigh as his pillow.
 The lion kneeled at his head,
 drawing its sword like a watchman.
 In order to protect him, the wolf
 joint his praetorian guards to lay down its life.
 The wild leopard (*palang*), which is by nature untamable,
 was laid down under him like a carpet (*palang*).
 These beasts, which roam the desert,
 were lining up in two or three rings around him.
 Like kings he was guarded by guards,
 sitting in the middle of the circle.
 Due to the fear of those wild bloodthirsty beasts,
 no one dared to associate with him.
 People who were not wanted by Majnūn,
 were immediately torn apart by the beasts.
 And those whom Majnūn desired to see,
 no beasts had the courage to touch them.
 No one whether they were Majnūn's acquaintances or kinsmen,
 could go near Majnūn without his command.
 (ll. 15-38)

Comparing this picture with the wild man in European literature, M.W. Dols concludes: "(...) Majnūn created a world that reflected his own insanity. (...) Majnūn's animal kingdom was an inversion of the normal Muslim perception of nature."⁷ Contrary to Dols' view, this passage shows how Majnūn releases himself from people and lives a solitary life. In arguing that Niẓāmī's Majnūn is utterly insane, Dols paradoxically leans on Hātifi's (d. 927/1520) portrayal of Majnūn in which, according to Dols, he is depicted as a wild man: "His 'wildness within' was a reflection of his 'wildness without': his long finger-nails, his long and unkempt hair, and the growth of his body hair." Dols' analysis of Majnūn's wildness is misleading for two basic reasons. Firstly, because he refers to Hātifi's Majnūn, who is very different to Niẓāmī's Majnūn. Hātifi's Majnūn is a profane lover and behaves childishly, whereas Niẓāmī's Majnūn is a serious char-

⁷ Ibid., p. 337.

acter and has many of the attributes of the mystic. Nizāmī does not refer to specific physical changes of Majnūn in the way Hātifī does. Secondly, Dols does not specify where in the poem Nizāmī says that Majnūn wanted to destroy himself. Majnūn enters the wilderness several times and never thinks of suicide. In addition, Dols describes Nizāmī's Majnūn as: "Emaciated, his feet were as hard as iron and his palms were like stone from crawling on all fours. The colour of his skin had turned from yellow to black because of the sun, and blackness had distinctly unfavourable connotations."⁸ But none of this can be found in Nizāmī's text.

J. Scott Meisami also deals with Majnūn's association with wild animals and places without any reference to Majnūn's kingship. She surmises that Majnūn's "abandonment to grief and habituation to life among the beasts amount to a denial of his own humanity."⁹ To support this view, she quotes Majnūn's own words by which he describes himself to his father as a wild animal in chapter 40:24-5:

I am lost in my own solitude (*wahshat*),
a wild [animal] (*wahshī*) does not live among people.
He who associates with the wild
will take over the habit of the wild.

In Scott Meisami's translation couplet 24 reads: "In my own wildness I have gone astray; a wild beast amongst human cannot stay."¹⁰ But Majnūn's words cannot be taken as a sign of his wildness, especially when we consider how complex his character is. The word *wahsh* and its derivatives used by Majnūn have a range of meanings and Nizāmī, the word magician, uses them deliberately. *Wahsh* means 'to be deserted,' 'to shy away,' 'wild beast' and 'savage.' The noun, *wahshat*, means 'loneliness,' 'solitariness,' 'dreariness,' and 'wildness' or fearing something. A close scrutiny of Majnūn's character shows that his words are a pretext that he uses time and again to escape from his father's insistence on his returning home. He applies the same strategy to persuade his mother that it is better for him to remain in the wilderness in chapter 50:61. Again in chapter 54:45, Majnūn employs this tactic to avoid Salām of Baghdad and to convince Salām that his love has not yet matured to the point that he

⁸ M.W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman*, p. 336.

⁹ J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 163.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

can lead a solitary life: "I shy away (*wahshī*) from human beings whereas you seek their company; seek the sort which is of your own species." It is true that Majnūn lives in the wilderness among animals, but such a life is neither a denial of his humanity, nor a sign of his insanity. As has been noted above, on various occasions in the poem Nizāmī explicitly states that by deserting human association, Majnūn embarked on a noble way of life. Nizāmī even invites the reader several times to live a life like that of Majnūn: to avoid human association and to be in harmony with nature. Majnūn's alienation from men and his association with the beasts are motifs borrowed by Nizāmī from mystic literature.¹¹ As the king of the animals, his presence brings order and harmony among the beasts. They lose their urge to kill and watch over him like a king's guard.

Moreover, to show that Majnūn is not wild, and that even animals are affected by his love, Nizāmī recounts a story that deals with monarchy, justice and benevolence. This is the story of the king of Marw, who keeps ferocious hounds to punish courtiers who fall out of his favour. The king throws wrongdoers to the kennels where they are ripped to pieces by the dogs. There was a shrewd young man among the king's courtiers, who found out about this savage method of punishment and decided to cultivate a friendship with the dog-keepers and then with the dogs themselves. One day the king became displeased with this youth and commanded that he be thrown to the dogs. The beasts did not harm him because they had become his friends. The following day, the king regretted his action and asked the courtiers to see what remained of the youth. The courtiers brought the miraculous news of the youth's well-being. The king repented and shed tears of remorse, summoning the youth and asking him for an explanation. The youth's answer contains the moral of the story and points to a number of issues. Firstly, it alludes to the king's justice, to the power of love that transforms even the most vicious beasts into obliging friends. Secondly, the youth's response teaches the king to tame the beast of his own soul because only by taming one's 'lower soul' (*nafs*) can a king rule over his subjects with justice. Thirdly, the entire story is a metaphor to illustrate how Majnūn has tamed his *nafs*, which in Islamic literature is often com-

¹¹ For a succinct survey of the "Poems on Abstinence" see J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, pp. 29-50.

pared to beasts. Furthermore, this tale justifies Majnūn's living with the animals. When the King asks the youth why the beasts did not devour him, he refers to the beasts' sense of gratitude, which may be lacking amongst mankind. Then the narrator concludes: "The king learned from this amazing story that liberation is to be attained through humanity (*mardumī*)" (chapter 44, l. 41). The narrator invites the reader to follow the example of Majnūn's life in the following passage, which has been disregarded by various scholars:

My intention in telling this tale is that
benevolence (*ihsān*) and generosity (*dahish*) are the fortresses of the soul.
By feeding those wild beasts, Majnūn
made a fortress around himself.
They, who were experienced in the handling of weapons,
circled themselves like a fortress around him.
Whether Majnūn wished to sit or rise,
he was not abandoned by his retinue.
You too, if you do as Majnūn did,
will not suffer from the world's hardships.
The one who sits at your table, even if he bears the title of a caliph,
will become your servant because he is fed by you.
(ll. 43-48)

Since Majnūn had acquired such a position amongst animals, not only did the beasts serve him, but also the people who visit him act and speak to Majnūn as a courtier would speak and act to a king. For instance, when the old enlightened messenger approaches Majnūn (in chapter 46:20-24), he throws himself at Majnūn's feet, saying: "O honour of those who have great names/you who have spread your skirt under the feet of the beasts." After saying this, he politely asks Majnūn's permission to speak: "If permission is granted I may recount/otherwise I will follow my own path."

What is more, Nizāmī links Majnūn's living with animals and his feeding on plants with the mystical notion of contentment, which in turn is connected to kingship. By bringing up the issue of contentment, Nizāmī advises the reader to distance himself from the kings. The poet also expresses his message to Shirwānshāh and explains why he, unlike many other poets, was reluctant to attend the court. Nizāmī repeatedly admonishes the reader about the negative qualities of kingship in his writings. In *Makhzan al-asrār*, he states that, apart from being just, the king must 'be in control of himself' (*khīsh-tandār*). The king should also withdraw from the world and be content. In the beautiful story of the owls and the ruined house, Nizāmī

shows that the king should not be a 'worshipper of the world' (*dunyā-parast*), ignorant of death and the hereafter.¹² Without doubt, Nizāmī knits these necessary qualities of kingship together with the character of Majnūn, portraying him as an ideal king under whose rule even the tame and wild beasts can live peacefully.

In *Laylī and Majnūn*, the poet finds a ready way to depict an ideal kingship which can be achieved only through severe ascetic training, altruism, utter devotion to God and a deep sympathy with the animal kingdom. In chapter 50, Salīm narrates a story for Majnūn about a king who, while passing through a land, sees a hovel in which an ascetic lived. The ascetic had abstained from eating meat and from sleeping. The king asks his retinue why this dervish has stopped eating. The ascetic replies that he finds satisfaction with eating grass only. One of the king's retinues responds to the man that he would receive better food if he would agree to be at the service of the king. The ascetic answers:

This speech is not in its place;
this is not grass, it is a sweet flower,
If you do not turn away your face from this grass,
you will be free from the service of the king.
(ll. 16-7)

Hearing these words, the king becomes emotional and jumps off his horse. He falls at the feet of the ascetic and, while kissing him and beseeching him, says: "Contentment is always pleasant/this is the patronage that gives contentment." (l. 20)

This story is not only used by Nizāmī to justify Majnūn's ascetic lifestyle, it also conveys a clear lesson for Shirwānshāh, for whom the poem is actually written. Nizāmī refers to such ascetic figures several times in his works, and in every case, in one way or the other, the king is made to surrender to the wisdom of the ascetic. In *Makhzan al-asrār* and in *Sharaf-nāma*, there are ascetics who live in a cave, eat plants and wear clothes made of plants. In the first of these, Nizāmī depicts the ascetic as an old man who shuns mankind like a fairy, making his garments from plants and earning his bread by making bricks.¹³ In *Sharaf-nāma*, when Alexander of Macedonia desires to meet an ascetic living in a cave, the latter is described by

¹² *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, pp. 80-3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

one of his attendants as a man who is "content with a handful of plants." Later, the ascetic introduces himself and gives the reason for his abstemious life:

I have not seen any fidelity of the world;
man does not expect succour from infidelity. (. . .)
"It is not my intention to eat much,
because eating much brings twisting to the stomach.
I cover myself with plants and my food is also from the plants;
by their elixir, I turn the stone into gold."¹⁴

A similar anecdote is recounted in Muḥammad 'Aufī's (567-630/1188-1251) *Jawāmi' al-ḥikāyāt*.¹⁵ In 'Aufī's account, Hippocrates the Physician (*Buqrāt-i ḥakīm*) is portrayed as an ascetic who has abandoned the world of outward forms and retreated to a cave. A king falls ill, and Hippocrates is summoned to cure him, but he eschews visiting the king. The king's vizier goes personally to Hippocrates and finds him in the cave clothing himself with plants. The vizier asks him to come to the king, but Hippocrates rejects his invitation. The vizier becomes vexed and says: "If you were able to be at the service of the king, you would not need to feed on plants." To which Hippocrates replies: "Were you be able to feed on plants, you would not need to be at the service of the king." This answer is almost identical to that of the ascetic occurring in *Laylī and Majnūn*. Such stories occur frequently in Persian sources to illustrate asceticism and contentment. 'Aṭṭār recounts the same story about Plato and Alexander.¹⁶ One of the Achaemenid kings is also reported to have invited Hippocrates to his court, but the latter refused to come.¹⁷

There are several references to Majnūn's contented nature in the poem. The earliest appears in chapter 20:30-5, in which Niẓāmī shows that Majnūn refrains from eating food, nourishing himself instead with the poisonous thought of separation. Another reference to Majnūn's contentment occurs in chapter 40:22, in which he tells his father that since he feeds on thorn bushes and is content, he

¹⁴ *Sharaf-nāma*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, pp. 319-20.

¹⁵ Muḥammad 'Aufī, *Jawāmi' al-ḥikāyāt*, p. 284. For a succinct biography of 'Aufī see J. Matīnī in *Elr*, under 'Aufī. See also M. Nizamuddin, *Introduction to the Jawāmi'*: *A Critical Study of its Scope, Sources and Value*, London, 1929.

¹⁶ See H. Ritter, *Das Meer*, p. 219.

¹⁷ M. Mu'īn, *Farhang-i Fārsī*, Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, eighth edition 1371, Vol. 5, under Buqrāt. Mu'īn gives no source reference.

does not need anyone. Majnūn's image as a king, who has reached an elevated position by being contented, is maintained to the very end of the poem. In chapter 65, when Zayd sees in his dream two persons in Paradise and asks an enlightened old man who they are, the man characterises Majnūn as a king.

It is certainly not strange, for Niẓāmī or for his royal audience, to address the theme of kingship in a romance. The majority of Persian romances are about princes and princesses, so that inevitably the theme of kingship arises. In addition, Niẓāmī had been commissioned to write this poem for Shirwānshāh, and it has a clear didactic intent for him and his heir. In *Haft paykar*, Niẓāmī introduces himself as an advisor of the king.¹⁸

In *Laylī and Majnūn*, Niẓāmī smoothly changes the original Bedouin character of Majnūn by emphasising his royal up-bringing and making him his father's sole heir. Niẓāmī's Majnūn possesses a lustrous beauty, goes to school and becomes a master in various 'arts' (*hunar*). Like Khusrau and Bahrām Gūr, Majnūn experiences a number of trials before he becomes a king, but his kingship differs totally from the kingship of Khusrau Parwīz or Bahrām. As emphasised by the narrator, Majnūn is like the Kayanian king, Kay Khusrau, "without throne and crown." The lack of these essential royal attributes alludes ironically to the mystical aspect of this ancient king, who disappeared into the snow. His disappearance is usually taken as a sign of his immortality.¹⁹ Kay Khusrau is the "most highly praised" king in the Avesta, possessing every beneficial attribute. Comparing Majnūn to these great kings, Niẓāmī puts much more emphasis on their spiritual and ethical aspects than on their profane qualities. It should be mentioned that before he is declared a king, Majnūn renounces all his material possession. In chapters 32 and 33 he saves a herd of gazelles and a deer from hunters by offering all his material possessions in exchange.

In addition, Majnūn's kingship replicates the kingship of Solomon, who according to the Koran (27:16,19) was acquainted with the languages of all animals and held sway over the entire animal king-

¹⁸ *Haft paykar*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 32, l. 3.

¹⁹ For an account of Kay Khusrau see I. Yarshater, "Iranian National History" in *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 3 (1), pp. 451-52. Niẓāmī uses the same motif of the disappearance of a king in his *Haft paykar* as well.

dom.²⁰ It is notable that of the many great world-rulers, Niẓāmī identifies Majnūn with Solomon, a prophet and a prototype of Muḥammad, a just and wise king (21:78–9), the owner of esoteric knowledge and the suppliant lover of Bilqīs. In this way, Niẓāmī universalises Majnūn's kingdom. Majnūn and Solomon are both chaste lovers. They both associate with animals and are the monarchs of the world. Niẓāmī also alludes subtly to Solomon's proverbial link with ants. According to the Koran (27:17–19), Solomon had a special relationship with these tiny creatures.²¹ In most of these stories, the wise and diligent ant advises Solomon. In chapter 23, Majnūn tells a story about a partridge and an ant to his father, and it is the ant that offers wise advice to the reader. There are also a number of incidental references to the ant, which amplify the parallelism drawn between Majnūn and Solomon.²² Moreover, Majnūn's death resembles that of Solomon, as we will see in the following chapter.

²⁰ See J. Walker and P. Fenton in *EI*, under Sulaymān b. Dāwūd.

²¹ For the relationship between Solomon and ants, see my article "Insects in Classical Persian Literature: the Case of the Ant" in *Persica*, No. 16, 2000, pp. 109–44.

²² 15:7; 62:25, 26, 100, 105; 64:8.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“WHEN THEY LOVE, THEY DIE”

*yik tīr ba nām-i man az tarkash barkash
w-āngah ba kamān-i sakht-i khīsh andar kash
gar hīch nishāna khāhī dil-i man
az tu zadan-i sakht w-az man āhī khash*

*Draw an arrow in my name from your quiver
And place it on your drawn bow;
If you seek a target, take my heart:
A mighty shot from you and a joyous sigh from me.¹*

Majnūn's love-death

Nizāmī's treatment of Majnūn's death, like his treatment of other aspects of this character, is sophisticated. This sophistication has given critics room for a range of interpretations of Majnūn's death. On the basis of the famous 'tradition of love' (*ḥadīth al-‘ishq*): "He who loves passionately, remains chaste, conceals his secret and dies, dies a martyr," M.W. Dols says that Majnūn's death is suicide rather than martyrdom: "Qays the savage would appear as the negator of Muslim social values. Indeed, the denial of life itself. For Nizāmī tells us that, soon after entering the wilderness, Qays desired to destroy himself out of despair. In the end, one can plausibly argue that Majnūn's death was suicide."² In his view, it makes a crucial difference that Majnūn has not concealed his love. Before we conclude that Nizāmī did not intend us to regard Majnūn's death as a suicide, we should consider several complications concerning the above tradition and Majnūn's public display of love, which Dols does not address.

¹ *Sawānīh*, p. 39, *fasl* 20 (2), ll. 11-2.

² M.W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman*, pp. 332, 335. As A. Miquel has concluded, Majnūn does not want to commit suicide in the Arabic sources. See A. Miquel, *Majnūn et Laylā*, p. 64.

Dols' rejection of Majnūn's martyrdom, which he bases on the *ḥadīth al-ʿishq*, becomes less convincing when one investigates the various sources in which the tradition occurs. The tradition almost certainly derives from 'Udhriism. It is used by Ibn Dāwūd of Iṣfahān (255–298/868–910), a Zāhirid jurist, in chapter eight of *Kitāb az-zahra* on "He who is a 'refined person' (*zarīf*) should be chaste." The tradition is employed to delineate the notion of chastity and not specifically martyrdom.³ The tradition became popular with mystics with the foundation of the Baghdad School of Sufism led by Junayd (d. 298/910). This school puts a particular emphasis on the concealment of love, and the *ḥadīth al-ʿishq* supported this doctrine perfectly. In contrast, the School of Khurāsān promoted a public display of love and intoxication.⁴ The latter took over the ideas of the Baghdad school and integrated these with its own philosophy. Ḥusayn Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj's public display of his love, which led to his execution in 922, and made him a mythical martyr of love, exerted a tremendous influence on the interpretation of this tradition by mystics. It was fairly widely circulated, and there are several versions of it in both Arabic and Persian.⁵ Irrespective of their personal beliefs, poets of different milieus have used the tradition to suit their needs. In Persian texts, the tradition is usually used to stress martyrdom, and the concealment of love is not always emphasised.⁶ What is significant, however, is that the tradition is often linked with the story of *Laylī and Majnūn* and Majnūn is taken as a martyr. Not only does the Arabic traditionalist Abū 'l-Faraj 'Abd ar-Raḥmān b. al-Jauzī (d. 579/1200) use the tradition in his *Dhamm al-hawā'* to refer to Majnūn as a martyr, but also many Persian poets comment on this tradition by referring to Majnūn. For instance, Fakhr ad-Dīn 'Irāqī

³ See W. Raven, *Ibn Dāwūd*, pp. 114–15.

⁴ See H. Ritter in *EI*, under Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī; A.J. Arberry in *EI*, under al-Djunayd. See also H. Mason, "Hallaj and the Baghdad School of Sufism" and T. Graham, "Abū Sa'īd ibn Abī 'l-Khayr and the School of Khurasan" in *Classical Persian Sufism*, pp. 65–81 and 83–135 respectively.

⁵ See W. Raven, *Ibn Dāwūd*, pp. 13–15, who deals with this tradition in Arabic literature, especially its use by Ibn Dāwūd al-Iṣfahānī; See also Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love*, pp. 99–115; Vadet, *L'esprit courtois*, pp. 459–63; Enderwitz, *Liebe als Beruf*, pp. 180–82; also T. Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung*, pp. 88–90, although dealing with love-death, no specific reference is made to the tradition.

⁶ The main theme of Bākhārī's treatise on love is actually an analysis of this tradition. See *Du risāla-yi 'irfānī*, pp. 93–105. See also *Raudat al-mudhannibīn*, p. 125; *Šūfi-nāma*, p. 209, ll. 10–11; *Uns at-tā'ibīn*, pp. 210, 218; *Sharḥ at-ta'arruf*, Vol. 4, p. 1419, ll. 4–5; *Ashī'at al-lama'āt*, p. 67.

discusses the tradition in his *Lama'āt* within the context of the philosophy of the Unity of Being, with a reference to Laylī and Majnūn:

Although the eyes of Majnūn are fixed on the beauty of Laylī, Laylī is no more than a mirror. It is for this reason that the Prophet (peace be upon him) has said: "He who loves and conceals his love and remains chaste and dies, dies as a martyr." Majnūn's contemplation of Laylī's beauty (*husn*) is fixed on such a Beauty (*jamāl*) that any beauty other than that is ugly, although Majnūn may not know this: *God is beautiful and loves Beauty*. No one else is worthy of being beautiful. Since no one but He manifests Himself in reality, how can there be Beauty? How can he see any beauty since there is nothing other than He who is manifested in reality? And He loves beauty. Indeed, the beauty is the quintessence of the Beloved, who gazes through the eyes of Majnūn upon His own beauty in the loveliness of Laylī and loves Himself through Laylī.⁷

It seems that for most Persian poets the most essential element of love-martyrdom is to die while in love. It might be added here that love and death are very close to each other in the everyday life of Muslims. As Franz Rosenthal observes: "Love, if it was true and deep, was considered destined to lead to sickness, insanity or death. There are various stages of love, the last being most fittingly expressed by the metaphor of 'killing' and 'being killed'."⁸

W.M. Dols' interpretation of Majnūn's death as suicide has little backing if his death is related to the Persian view of love. Despite the condemnation of suicide by Islamic law, Persian writers consider it as a sign of the lover's chastity and altruism; the poet usually takes the lover's suicide as martyrdom. In *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, the beloved heroine slays herself with a dagger upon the dead body of Khusrau.⁹ The mere fact of dying is the most fundamental element in a romance; it is a sign of a premature and suffering death as well as a token of the maturation of love and of the absolute devotion of the lover towards the beloved. Therefore, neither theorists of love nor romantic

⁷ *Lama'āt* in *Kulliyāt-i Shaykh Fakhr ad-Dīn Hamadānī Mutakhalliṣ ba 'Irāqī*, ed. S. Nafīsī, Tehran: Sanā'ī, 1370, pp. 384-85.

⁸ Franz Rosenthal "Reflections on Love in Paradise" in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, ed. J.H. Marks et al., Guilford: Four Quarters Publishing Company, 1987, pp. 247-48.

⁹ *Khusrau u Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwatiyān, 94:28. For the Islamic view on martyrdom and suicide see E. Kohlberg, *Medieval Muslim Views on Martyrdom*, Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, part 60, no. 7, 1997, pp. 27-31.

poets concern themselves with the implications in terms of religious prohibitions. When Shīrīn dies in chapter 94:35, Nizāmī comments: "It is compulsory to die in this way while in love/the soul should be submitted to the beloved in this way."

In 'Udhrite romances the lover often perishes on the grave of his beloved.¹⁰ Such scenes are universal and are depicted to stimulate the audience's emotions as well as to show the lovers' faithfulness. In many Persian romances, the lover's death is interpreted either in the context of martyrdom or as removing the temporal veil of life, which separates the lover from the beloved. Metaphorically, death is a rebirth in the Beloved. For instance, in his commentary on Solomon's death, Maybudī distinguishes between two types of deaths by stating: "Death is of two kinds: exterior death and interior death. Exterior death is perceptible by everyone. Friend and foe can realise it. (. . .) However the interior death is that man dies in himself by his selflessness so that he be awakened in God, through God and with God."¹¹ Majnūn's death is interior. In fact, during his life, Majnūn had died several times before he actually died on Laylī's grave. In Nizāmī's philosophy, death is regarded as relocation and return to the Beloved. In the very first chapter of *Laylī and Majnūn*, Nizāmī states:

Why should I fear if death arrives,
I know that the road leads to You.
Death is not a garden or an orchard,
it is the road to the house of friends. (. . .)
If I look at it in the right way
this death is not death, it is a change of place;
From a dining-room to a sleeping-room
and from a sleeping-room to the banquet of a King. (. . .)
Since longing for You is in me, I will arise from my home;
I will sleep well and arise joyously.
(ll. 89–90, 92 3, 95)

Majnūn's death should also be interpreted in the Sufi framework in which the lover desires to be 'slain or burned by the beloved' (*kushta-yi* or *sūkhta-yi ma'shūq*). There are several references in the poem to Majnūn's longing to be beheaded by Laylī. With a severed head,

¹⁰ See, for instance, the death of Gulshāh on the grave of Warqa in 'Ayyūqī's *Warqa u Gulshāh*, p. 155. See also J. Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd*, pp. 264–65.

¹¹ *Kashf al-asrār*, p. 272.

the lover dances ecstatically to welcome death, which he interprets as union with the beloved. The lover is not afraid of losing his head. The compound, *sar-dādan*, which is often used in love poetry to express the lover's self-sacrifice, is ambiguous, meaning 'to bid farewell to reason,' 'to be obedient' and literally to 'offer one's head.' Amatory texts give several reasons why the lover should offer his head. The most important argument is that when the beloved kills the lover, the lover is regarded as a martyr, and thus he can live eternally. There are several scenes in Persian love poetry in which the lover fervently desires to be murdered by the beloved. The tragic death of Ḥallāj serves as a model of a selfless lover who is ready to be cut to pieces for the beloved. The most poignant report of Ḥallāj's death is that by 'Aṭṭār, who describes Ḥallāj's execution in vivid and moving language.¹² Alluding to Ḥallāj, Niẓāmī states in one of his *ghazals* that "in the world of love, I am chanting: 'I am God' because I have my head on my body for the gallows."¹³ Nāgaurī reports that when Ḥallāj was asked "When does the perfection of the joy of love appear?" He answered: "At the moment that the beloved has drawn out the spread of punishment and has prepared the lover, to murder him."¹⁴

Another reason why a lover such as Majnūn longs to be beheaded is because he can only be released from the scorching pain of love by renouncing his head. By alluding to the Prophetic tradition, *mūtū qabla an tamūtū* 'die before you die,' beheaded lovers are often compared to a candle which burns brighter when its head is cut off, that is, when the wick is trimmed. Elaborating on this candle imagery, some poets say that the lover's head must be severed because he has revealed the secret of love: in this imagery the shape of the candle's flame resembles a tongue or a pen which reveals the loving state of the candle.¹⁵ Like other poets, Niẓāmī takes the head as the source of 'headache' (*sar-dard*).¹⁶ In fact, one of the beloved's functions, as the healer, is to cut the lover's head from his body and remove the headache. When the poor lover asks her why she wants

¹² 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, pp. 509-18; on the theme of death at the hand of the beloved in 'Aṭṭār's writings, see H. Ritter, *Das Meer*, pp. 395-99; J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, p. 107.

¹³ *Diwān-i Niẓāmī*, ed. Nafīsī, p. 305, l. 1250.

¹⁴ *Lawā'ih*, p. 100.

¹⁵ For candle imagery see J.T.P. de Bruijn in *Elr*, under Candle.

¹⁶ *Diwān-i Niẓāmī*, ed. Nafīsī, p. 265, l. 698.

to behead him, she coldly answers that this is an ancient tradition and it is not the first time such a thing has happened.¹⁷

Ḥakīm Sanā'ī portrays love in the *Ḥadiqa* as a force that severs the head and reveals the secret (*sar bur-i sirr-namā*).¹⁸ Love reveals its secret only to those lovers whose heads are severed. When the lover arrives at the seashore, he must bid farewell to his head. The often-used phrase, *sar bar qadam nihādan*, 'to put one's head before the foot' means both to tread the path of love whole-heartedly and submissively, and to literally put one's head before the foot. The head should be sacrificed in order to receive the secret of love. The cutting off of the head is necessary because love then becomes assured that the lover will not reveal the secret and will not think rationally. In another poem erroneously attributed to Sanā'ī, *Sanā'ī-ābād*, the poet again dwells on the same theme, adding that on the path of love, the head is a shield for the soul.¹⁹ Sanā'ī calls the head a 'tell-tale' (*ghammāz*) and says that since the head betrays the lover and reveals the secret it should be cut off on the path of love. Love itself does not speak to a lover who cherishes his head: "Love came as a ravisher of the heart which robs the soul/it came to behead and to reveal the secret//love tells the secret to those whose heads are severed/because love knows that the head is a *ghammāz*."²⁰ To explain the nature of love, Sanā'ī tells a brief anecdote in which he demonstrates the difference between a frozen man and a lover: the former, who lacks love, is astonished when he sees that the latter smiles when he is about to be beheaded by his beloved. When he asks the reason for the meaningful smile, the lover says: "When the Beautiful Ones lift up the curtain, the lovers die in this way before them."²¹ A lover who fears to lose his head can be taken as a 'pretender' (*mudda'ī*). In *Manṭiq at-ṭayr*, when a poor man falls in love with a king, the king asks him either to leave the town or to offer his head for love. When the man goes for the first choice, the king immediately orders his head be cut off, because he was a pretender and not a true lover.²²

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 268, l. 739.

¹⁸ Sanā'ī, *Ḥadiqat*, Ms., Bagdatli Vehbi, p. 135r, On love, l. 1.

¹⁹ See De Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, p. 114.

²⁰ *Ḥadiqa*, Ms., Bagdatli Vehbi, chapter On love, f. 135b, l. 2.

²¹ Ibid., f. 135b, ll. 13-5.

²² *Manṭiq at-ṭayr*, pp. 108-09, ll. 1949-64.

In a quatrain attributed to Abū Sa'īd, he stresses that the attainment of the beloved is only possible by bidding farewell to one's head.²³ Playing on the word 'leader' (*sar-dār*) and 'on the gallows' (*sar-i dār*) Shihāb Khārī says that in the world of love, whoever is a *sar-dār*, knows in his 'head' (*sar*) that he will be on the 'gallows' (*dār*).²⁴ Another poet, Jamāl Ḥājī Shirwānī states that lovers who offer their lives for love actually desire to find the head (that is, the end) of the cord of love (*sar-rishta-yi 'ishq*).²⁵ 'Aṭṭār uses the imagery of the ball and the polo-stick to show the lover's desire to be beheaded. When the lover sees the curly lock of the beloved, he mistakes it for a polo-stick and wishes to be beheaded, so that his head may be the ball struck by the beloved's stick. This imagery shows, of course, the lover's submissive behaviour as well as his desire to be united with the beloved even for a moment.²⁶

There are numerous tales in which poets dwell on the *kushta-yi ma'shūq* but there is one scene in 'Aṭṭār's *Ilāhī-nāma* which deserves special attention. It is the story of a poor girl who falls in love with a prince.²⁷ Hearing this, the prince's father becomes furious and gives orders to execute the girl by tying her hair to the leg of a horse. When the king asks the girl for her last wish, she says that she desires to be killed by the horse of the prince, so that she will be killed through the medium of the beloved. In another anecdote, when a lover hears that his beloved is going to die, he runs to her with a knife in his hand to kill her. When onlookers ask about this madness, he says that if he kills the beloved, he himself will be killed in retaliation, and thus he will be named *kushta-yi ma'shūq*.²⁸

The same theme is repeated in the *Ushshāq-nāma* ascribed to Fakhr ad-Dīn 'Irāqī.²⁹ Here a 'furnace-stoker' (*gulkhantāb*) falls in love with a prince but the latter ignores him. To draw the prince's attention, the stoker wears the skin of a gazelle and hides in the hunting

²³ *Sukhanān-i manẓūm-i Abū Sa'īd*, p. 40, q. 278.

²⁴ *Nuzhat al-majālīs*, (1366) p. 205, (1375) p. 245, q. 738.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, (1366) p. 206, (1375) p. 246, q. 744.

²⁶ 'Aṭṭār, *Dīwān*, p. 96.

²⁷ *Ilāhī-nāma*, pp. 48-51. A separate study would be required to explore the various aspects of the lover's desire to be killed by the beloved. Many writers dwell on this subject and give different reasons why the lover wishes to be killed by the beloved. Rūmī, for instance, compares the lover to Ismā'īl who joyfully gave his head to his father Abraham to be cut off. See *Mathnawī*, Vol. 1, p. 19, ll. 228-30.

²⁸ *Mantiq at-tayr*, pp. 192-93.

²⁹ *Ushshāq-nāma* in *Kulliyāt-i Shaykh Fakhr ad-Dīn*, pp. 21-2.

ground. When the prince enters the area, he sees the gazelle and shoots a deadly arrow at it. The bleeding stoker stands and joyously sings that he has attained eternity. Both stories belong to the romantic genre of the king and the beggar (*shāh-u gadā*), revealing splendidly not only the low and servile rank of the lover, but also how the lover attains eternal life by being slain at the hands of the beloved. The desire to be beheaded is so strong that the lover usually cheerfully dances to the gallows.

One conspicuous point in the above stories, which is also usually mentioned in connection with the lover's desire to be beheaded, is that the lover desires to dance when he finds out that the beloved has accepted him. Destroyed by love, the lover ecstatically dances, without his head. There are many poetic allusions to the lover's ecstatic death, many of them referring to the execution of Ḥusayn Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj, who is said to have danced on his way to the gallows. In fact, poets such as Rūmī combine the myth of Ḥallāj with Majnūn's selfless love, as in the following couplet: "God, give a sign of your favour for we do not fear the gallows/We are like Majnūn for we are in love with God."³⁰ In *Mukhtār-nāma*, 'Aṭṭār refers several times to the lover's ecstatic dance and his desire to offer his life: "A thousand lives are needed in each breath so that we offer them to your face while dancing."³¹ One of the references, recited spontaneously by Iranians even today, is the following line by Ḥāfiz: "Man should go dancing under the beloved's sword of sorrow/because he who is slain by her finds a sweet end."³²

At several points in the poem, Majnūn expresses his desire to dance and to be slain by Laylī. In the following couplet (16:22), the poet points to Majnūn's mystical dance (*samāʿ*).³³ "While drinking the morning wine, Laylī was caressing her soul/while dancing, Majnūn was tearing his Sufi-cloak (*khirqa-bāzī*)." In several passages,

³⁰ As cited by G. van den Berg, *Minstrel Poetry from the Pamir Mountains: A Study on the Songs and Poems of the Ismāʿīlīs of Tajik Badakhshan*, Ph.D. dissertation, 1997, p. 68; for the Ismāʿīlī use of the lover's desire to die, see Van den Berg's chapter 1.2.1 Aspects of love, pp. 62–78, especially p. 70.

³¹ 'Aṭṭār, *Mukhtār-nāma*, p. 221, q. 1123.

³² Ḥāfiz, *Diwān*, p. 230, gh. 107, l. 7.

³³ For more information on the *samāʿ* ritual in Sufism see A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 178–86; F.D. Lewis, *Past and Present, East and West*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2000, pp. 28–9; C.W. Ernst, *Sufism: An Essential Introduction to the Philosophy and Practice of the Mystical Tradition of Islam*, Boston: Shambhala, 1997, chapter 7.

Majnūn declares that he is ready to offer his head for the beloved and that he actually wants to be slain by her hand. In chapter 23, Majnūn communicates to his father his strong desire for self-sacrifice. As can be inferred from the following verses, Majnūn distinguishes two ways of dying: firstly, for those who are in love but fear the blade, and secondly, for lovers who are not afraid of the beloved's sword. The former simply die, while the latter die a martyr's death:

Do not say that the blade is sharp in matters of love,
for this love was originally reared at home (*i.e.* the heart).
A head, which flees from the sword,
could better be cut off by a fighting man.
In love, there is no place to be afraid of the blade;
for the blade spares the head of lovers.
A lover faces the dread of life;
he who is in search of the beloved fears not the world.
Since my moon has fallen into mist
I bare my head for the blade; where is the blade?
A head which excuses itself from sacrifice,
could better be punished by the blade.
This soul, which has been cast into the fire,
accords well with my unhappiness.
My soul is in such disrepair,
leave me, what do you want from my soul?
(ll. 10-17)

Not only does Majnūn die as a martyr of love like many other 'Udhrite lovers, his death also resembles that of Solomon. According to the Koran (34:14) when Solomon died, he was resting on his staff and no one was aware of his death until termites ate away the staff and the body collapsed. In the same way, when Majnūn perished on Laylī's grave in chapter 64, his corpse remains there for about a year, during which the people think that he is just sleeping there. During this time, his animals remain faithfully guarding him:

When Majnūn departed from this world,
he was released from men's reproach.
He lay in the cradle of his bride;
sleep robbed him and closed his eyes.
He was not satisfied in this house (*i.e.* world), which is full of smoke;
when he slept, he rested with love.
He remained lying in the same condition
for a month; no, I heard, for a year.
And those beasts that moved freely
remained marching around him.

Majnūn was sleeping like a king on the throne
 and they were all keeping watch over him.
 Because of the fear of the wild beasts
 none could approach him from left or right.
 People thought that the wounded stranger
 was sitting in the same spot as he used to sit,
 And that the brilliant beasts were heroically
 holding watch over the king.
 They did not know that the king had died,
 that the wind had taken away his crown and [royal] girdle.
 (ll. 61-72)

People finally learn of Majnūn's death in the following way:³⁴

Because of earthquakes originating with the revolution of the spheres
 Majnūn's body broke into pieces and was scattered on the earth.
 No sign of his body remained
 save a few scraps of bones.
 [However], none of those wolfish dogs, which feed on bones,
 desired to eat his bones.
 As long as the wild beasts were on that spot,
 no one put a foot on that sacred place (*haram*).
 (ll. 74-7)

Having found out about Majnūn's death, the people approach his remains, weeping bitterly and tearing their garments as a sign of grief. They wash the corpse with their profuse tears, and then open Laylī's grave and lay Majnūn beside his beloved. It is worth mentioning that although Nizāmī makes no explicit verbal reference to martyrdom, and does mention the ritual washing of the body, which is required for any Muslim burial except that of a martyr, the way he describes Majnūn's body and his departure from this world testify to a martyrdom. The washing of Majnūn's body should be taken as a sign of people's intense sorrow. Like the body of a martyr, Majnūn's body does not stink and instead has the odour of musk and ambergris. This image recurs in hagiographies, but also in books on love, the most celebrated being Sarrāj's *Maṣāriḥ al-ʿushshāq*.³⁵ Majnūn's corpse is described as follows:

³⁴ For an account of Solomon's death see the Koran 34:14.

³⁵ For a discussion on love and death in Sarrāj's book see Vadet, *L'esprit courtois*, chapter 9. In part four, chapters 10-85 of *Jawāmiʿ al-ḥikāyāt*, which is entitled "On persons who fell into the Whirlpool of love and succumbed to it, 'Aufī describes several lovers, among whom is Majnūn, who died of love. See M. Nizamuddin, *Introduction to the Jawāmiʿ*, pp. 240-41.

That body, which had shed its pearl,
remained like a bright shell.
People furbished gold around his shell
and then rubbed ambergris on his shell.
[However], Majnūn, who had a musky ambergris,
had a sweet smell because of his own bag of musk.
(ll. 88-90)

The death of the king of love is also depicted with bacchic imagery.³⁶ This type of imagery was current in mystic circles during Nizāmī's era, and Nizāmī uses it in chapter twelve of *Laylī and Majnūn* and throughout his *Sharaf-nāma*, in the *sāqī-nāma* sections. The *sāqī-nāma* (literally, cup-bearer's book) consists of two rhyming couplets which often give a succinct description of the entire chapter. The following verses are not a *sāqī-nāma*, but the imagery draws on the theme of wine drinking. Here, Majnūn's grave is compared to a tavern, his death to an ecstatic state and 'the cup-bearer' (*sāqī*) can be identified as the object of his love: the heavenly beloved:

People have taken the king to the wine-house;
while he was drunken, they entrusted him to the Cup-bearer.
With pride the lovers slept till Doomsday;
reproach was removed from their path.
(chapter 64, ll. 94-5)

Laylī's death is also depicted as a martyrdom. Laylī too reveals her 'hidden secret,' which is her love for Majnūn, in chapter 61 (ll. 36ff.) and then dies. To indicate that here death is a martyrdom, Nizāmī says in chapter 62:44 that red tulips grew from her grave: red tulips are still a symbol of martyrdom in Persia. In addition, as in 'Ayyūqī's *Warqa and Gulshāh*, Nizāmī tells how the tomb of Laylī and Majnūn becomes a pilgrim site. People journey from all corners of the world to pray and to obtain their desires:

That garden (*i.e.* tomb) which became the envy of the orchard,
became a place of succour for the whole world.
Whoever arrived there, whether he was a stranger or suffering,
became instantly free of grief and anguish.
No one would leave the garden
without obtaining his desire.
(ll. 98-100)

³⁶ For the use of this imagery in Persian see W.L. Hanaway in *El*, under *Sāqī*: 2. In Persian Usage; see also J.W. Clinton, in *Elr*, under *Bāda*.

Piecing together several concepts discussed in this chapter, we can conclude that Nizāmī's portrayal of Majnūn as a martyr of love is novel. Although in mystical texts, Majnūn is usually associated with the 'tradition of love' (*ḥadīth al-ʿishq*), the references are cursory. Nizāmī integrates Majnūn's desire for martyrdom into his romance in a subtle way, focusing on Majnūn's ecstatic desire for decapitation. In line with Persian mystical tradition, in which a lover is expected to offer his head to the beloved, in this romance, Nizāmī shows how fervently Majnūn longs to be beheaded by Laylī. Offering one's head to the beloved is not only a sign of the lover's submissiveness, his readiness to offer his life to the beloved, it is also a sign that the lover has eliminated his rational faculty.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“MADNESS MAY SERVE A PURPOSE”

*ān gul-i surkh ast tu khūnash makhān
mast-i ‘aql ast ū tu majnūnash makhān*

*That is a red rose; do not call it his blood;
he is drunk with reason; do not call him Majnūn.¹*

1. *Approaches to the madness of Majnūn*

Madness is perhaps the most controversial trait of Qays’ character. Abū ’l-Qāsim Ḥasan of Nayshābūr (d. 406/1027) opens his account of the legendary Majnūn in his *Kūtāb ‘uqalā’ al-majānīn* (*The Book of the Rational Madmen*) saying: “Among the lovers who have become famous under the name of Majnūn, the mad lover of Laylā (*majnūn Laylā*) is the most famous. His story is so intense and universal that his madness has overshadowed his name, so that if he is called by his own or his father’s name, people do not recognise him; they refer to him as Majnūn.”² Scholars such as M.W. Dols, R. Gelpke, A. Bombaci, J.C. Vadet and A.E. Khairallah have approached Majnūn’s madness from different perspectives. M.W. Dols’ analysis is the most extended of these, but unfortunately does not plumb the depths of this essential aspect of Majnūn. This is in part because he relies heavily on secondary sources rather than on Nizāmī’s textually rich poem. Moreover, he often confuses Nizāmī’s Majnūn with Majnūn as portrayed by other poets. Although he recognizes that Nizāmī wrote the poem for a twelfth-century Persian audience, he altogether ignores the flowering of the Persian mystical tradition during this period. E.G. Browne’s famous statement that in the thirteenth century, “mysticism was so much in the air” also applies to a large extent to the twelfth century, when great mystics such as the

¹ Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, Vol. 1, p. 20, l. 239.

² *‘Uqalā’ al-majānīn*, ed. U. al-As’ad, Beirut: Dār an-Nafā’is, 1987, p. 100.

brothers Ghazālī, Rūzbihān Baqlī, Sanā'ī and many others were promoting Sufism.³

Dols argues against interpreting Majnūn as a mystic and declares him mad, simply because he does not perform his daily obligatory prayers. But there is no mention of Majnūn's neglect of daily prayer in Nizāmī's poem; in fact the narrator emphasises in chapter 55 that Majnūn is not one of those who neglect their daily prayers. Dols exaggerates when he hypothesises that Majnūn is "even a threat to the solemnity of Muslim worship."⁴ Many Sufi masters such as Ḥallāj did not follow the *sharī'a* strictly, because they believed to have passed the stage of human limitations. One of the purposes of performing religious duties is to be reminded of God. Sufis such as Ḥallāj lived in and with the Beloved constantly and did not need such mundane duties to remember God. For the mystics, man's 'intention' (*niyya*) is much more important than the outward performance of a religious duty.

Relying on Hātifi's version of the story, Dols declares Majnūn insane because he clasps "a dog to his chest in front of Laylī's house (. . .)."⁵ By referring only to the orthodox Islamic view, which deems the dog an unclean animal, Dols overlooks the Persian and the mystical views of the dog. In pre-Islamic Persia, dogs were remarkably respected. This veneration has left traces in the Islamic era, especially in Sufism, where the animal became a symbol of humility.⁶ The dog plays an important role in many Laylī and Majnūn romances and anecdotes. In fact, to be 'the dog of the beloved's alley' (*sag-i kū-yi dūst*) is a popular *topos* in Persian love poetry, comparing the lover to a faithful dog who waits by the door. Nizāmī shows his sympathy for the dog in several places. In addition to the dogs of Laylī's alley, *Laylī and Majnūn* refers to the dogs of a king at Marw. Two stories in the *Makhzan* also refer to the dog. In the first, the disciples of Jesus see a dead dog and refer to its negative qualities, but Jesus teaches them to avoid focussing on the negative by point-

³ E.G. Browne, *A History of Persian Literature*, Vol. 2, p. 526.

⁴ M.W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman*, p. 336.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

⁶ See M. & T.P. Omidshahar in *Elr*, under Dog I. For the pre-Islamic Persian view of the dog see M. Boyce in *Elr*, under Dog II. In Zoroastrianism. For the image of the dog in Sufism see N. Pūrjawādī, *ʿAyn al-Qudāt*, pp. 77-81; *idem*, "Sag-i kū-yi dūst wa khak-i rāhash" in *Nashr-i dānish*, No. 3, 15, 1374, pp. 9-15; see also J. Nurbakhsh *Dogs from a Sufi Point of View*, New York/London: KNP, 1989.

ing to its beautiful shining teeth.⁷ In the second story, the mystic Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya (d. 185/801) finds a thirsty dog in the desert and cuts off her own hair to make a rope which she uses to get water from a well, thus saving it.⁸

In the episode in which Majnūn hugs a dog, the dog and the dust and the alley are all elevated by the association with Laylī. As 'Ayn al-Qudāt has said: "If Majnūn shows some love and affection to the dog in Laylī's alley, this love is not for the dog but for Laylī."⁹ Following this episode, dogs remind Majnūn of Laylī. They also function as Majnūn's guards, protecting him from people. Dols has even misinterpreted his source, because Hātifi himself regards Majnūn's action in a positive light, since he condemns those who call Majnūn mad, Laylī's father included:

An ignorant person, who could not understand his (Majnūn's) discourse,
named the man with intellect (*'āqil*) insane (*ḍiwāna*).
That traveller of love (Majnūn) was a perfect man;
he was not mad; he was a man with intellect.¹⁰

Dols, from an analysis which is too simplistic for a complex poem such as Niẓāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn*, supposes that Majnūn seeks only separation from his beloved. Dols apparently overlooks Majnūn's ceaseless efforts to unite himself with Laylī. Initially Majnūn spends his sleepless nights in the vicinity of Laylī's quarter, desiring to be united with her. Other people such as Majnūn's father and Naufal try to unite the lovers but, because of opposition from Laylī's father, every attempt fails. What is more, in Persian theories of love, it is often said that a true lover should choose separation and bid farewell to union. In mystical treatises on love, a higher status is usually accorded to separation than union because, during separation, there is hope of union, whereas during union there is always the fear of separation. Aḥmad Ghazālī discusses these aspects of love extensively in the *Sawānīh*. He says that union is the rank (*martaba*) of the beloved,

⁷ *Makhzan al-asrār*, p. 126; the same story is told in Ghazālī's *Kīmīyā*, Vol. 2, p. 87 and this must be Niẓāmī's source.

⁸ *Makhzan al-asrār*, p. 89.

⁹ *Tamhīdat*, p. 139, ll. 11-2.

¹⁰ *Laylī Majnūn: A Persian Poem of Hātifi*, Calcutta: Manuel Cantopher, p. 38; *Laylī-u Majnūn*, ed. S. Asadollayev, p. 53, ll. 1023-026; Hātifi adds: "He suffered irritation from associating with people; he withdrew the hem of his robe from among the people, (. . .) Expect little of the ways of fidelity and love from these dog-like people who have the form of man."

whose attributes include self-sufficiency, supremacy and glory, whereas separation belongs to the lover, whose attributes consist of self-abasement, needfulness and poverty.¹¹ Ghazālī presents the lover and the beloved as opposites, who despite this opposition are paradoxically complementary. The beloved can become aware of her own attributes when she compares them to those of the lover. He emphasises that the attributes of the beloved will not be manifest until she has seen the lover's attributes.

Dols continues his argument that Nizāmī's Majnūn is mad, by stating: "It is also significant that Nizāmī says that Qays in his distracted state could no longer distinguish good from evil. This characteristic was surely an important means of describing madness to a Muslim audience. It was virtually the legal description of insanity."¹² Dols does not state where Nizāmī says this, but he is apparently referring to a single couplet in which Nizāmī uses the rhetorical figures 'antithesis' (*mutadādd*) and 'antistrophe' (*aks*) and 'repetition' (*takrīr*), all in one line, to describe how deeply love has affected Majnūn:

bā nīk-u badī ki būd dar sākhī
nīk az bad u bad zi nīk nashnākht

He went along with good and evil as they were,
 he did not know good from evil, or evil from good.
 (chapter 18, l. 69)

The ability to distinguish good from evil is, in a legal context, part of the definition of legal competence, but this is not the point here. Nizāmī's reference, in a mystical context, is to the belief that man's goal should transcend normative concepts such as good and evil: for the lover focuses solely on the beloved and forgets other considerations. In chapter 52:20, when an old man brings Majnūn's news to Laylī, he emphasises that Majnūn is not aware of good and evil, and his glance (*nazar*) is fixed on Laylī's path. Majnūn's lack of concern with good and evil is a positive sign, showing his liberation from anything other than Laylī. In fact, as can be seen from the following couplet, Nizāmī believes that man must be like bright light:

The condition for embarking [upon the path] is that you
 become as free from the taint of good and evil as the light.
 (chapter 12, l. 109)

¹¹ *Sawānīh*, pp. 60–1, *fasl* 39 (3), ll. 18–24. See also *ibid.*, pp. 48–9, *fasl* 28 (1–2).

¹² M.W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman*, p. 335.

While Dols entirely rejects the mystical aspects in Niẓāmī's Majnūn, A.E. Khairallah goes to the other extreme, insistently emphasising the mystical origin of the legend of Majnūn. Although Khairallah does not discuss Niẓāmī's romance, and concentrates chiefly on Abū Bakr al-Wālibī's *Dīwān* and Jāmī's (d. 898/1492) mystical treatment of *Laylī and Majnūn*, it is interesting for the present discussion to consider briefly how Khairallah approaches Majnūn's madness.¹³ Despite his focus on mystical aspects, the author does not pay much attention to the mystical ideas presented in al-Wālibī's *Dīwān*. He explains that the *Dīwān* "hints at, but does not develop, many of the motifs that were part of the Sufi stock-in trade."¹⁴ Indeed, the Arabic sources of the legend prior to Niẓāmī's poem lack any elaborated mystical dimension, but it is surely with Niẓāmī that the mystical potential of the story is first fully explored. All the subsequent accounts of Majnūn have been affected by Niẓāmī's romance. Jāmī's poem is a purely mystical imitation of Niẓāmī, as the poet states several times in the poem.

A.E. Khairallah examines the legend as an archetype and Majnūn as an inspired madman. Prior to Khairallah's study, R. Gelpke examined Majnūn's love, madness and poetry as a "magisches Dreieck," an idea originating from Plato's theory of the four types of inspired madmen: "The Prophet, inspired by Apollo; the mystic, by Dionysus; the poet, by the Muses; and—the highest type—the lover, inspired by Aphrodite and Eros."¹⁵ According to Khairallah, "Plato's four types of divine madness can be detected in Majnūn, (...) the legend includes the seeds of a character capable of integrating within himself these four types of madness, simply by integrating their four inspiring gods in one: Laylā."¹⁶ In this way, the author interprets Laylī as the cause of the madman's possession, who is at the same time the "Muse, the Beloved or the Jinni." One of Khairallah's final conclusions is that Majnūn's character reveals Islamic peoples' "thirst for the absolute." Although such a statement has a certain validity,

¹³ A.E. Khairallah's analysis is based on Abū Bakr al-Wālibī's *Dīwān* of Qays b. al-Mulawwah al-Majnūn. The historicity of al-Wālibī and the dating of his *Dīwān* has been disputed. See chapter three of A.E. Khairallah, *Love, Madness*.

¹⁴ A.E. Khairallah, *Love, Madness*, p. 91.

¹⁵ R. Gelpke, "Liebe und Wahnsinn als Thema eines persischen Dichters zur Madschnun-Gestalt bei Nezami" in *Symbolon*, Vol. 4, 1964, pp. 108-10. A.E. Khairallah, *Love, Madness*, p. 18.

¹⁶ A.E. Khairallah, *Love, Madness*, pp. 23-4.

it is a limited evaluation of Majnūn's character, because for Muslims, Majnūn served and still serves as a concrete example of what love can do to man. It can metaphorically bring him to union with the Absolute but it can literally ruin his life. Majnūn's name and anecdotes about his madness are often cited to illustrate both of these aspects of love. In sum, the advantage of Khairallah's methodology is that not only the spiritual aspects of Majnūn's character come to the fore, but also how Plato's theory may be applied to a character in Islamic literature. The disadvantage of Khairallah's approach is that it obscures Majnūn's 'madness,' in the ordinary sense of the word, which is an essential part of his legendary character. Moreover, by neglecting Nizāmī's version of the story, which is the climax of the legend's development in almost every respect, Khairallah misses the interaction between mystical and profane love and how closely these two operate in Majnūn's legend.¹⁷

J.C. Vadet studies the character of Majnūn in early Arabic sources. Vadet's analysis of Majnūn is interesting for the present discussion because the author shows the differences between Majnūn and other 'Udhrite lovers. Vadet tries cautiously to analyse Majnūn's madness within the context of "folie poétique" or "folie d'amour."¹⁸ By comparing the legendary Majnūn with Jamīl, another thwarted 'Udhrite lover, Vadet shows that Majnūn's specific traits were an attempt by Arabic poets to revive pre-Islamic notions, including the motif of the inspired poet. Jamīl concealed his love and paid attention to people's reaction: his love is feasible and attainable. Majnūn neither pays attention to people, nor conceals his love, and his love is unattainable. In Vadet's view, the legendary Majnūn is a lover who lives a solitary life, a kind of ascetic who avoids company and a poet who lives in his own poetry.¹⁹ Majnūn, like Ḥallāj, revealed the secret of love and, like him, he has been declared mad.

Alessio Bombaci briefly analyses Nizāmī's Majnūn and praises the way the poet has depicted the external signs of his madness. According to the Italian scholar, these signs include: "Lack of interest in food and clothing, extreme thinness, wandering and avoidance of men,

¹⁷ For a comprehensive evaluation of A.E. Khairallah's book consult, J.T.P. de Bruijn's review in *Persica*, No. 12, 1987, pp. 152-55; also see J. Scott Meisami's review in *Edebiyât*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1979, pp. 277-86.

¹⁸ J.C. Vadet, *L'esprit courtois*, pp. 368-78.

¹⁹ The legendary Majnūn in Arabic sources is rejected by people, whereas Nizāmī's Majnūn chooses to withdraw from human society.

friendship with the beasts, obstinate silence and discourse only of Laylā, but no epileptic fury against itself."²⁰ Indeed Niẓāmī's Majnūn does not harm himself. The signs enumerated by Bombaci are, as we have seen earlier, ascetic traits which do not necessarily point to Majnūn's madness.

Having briefly assessed various views on Majnūn's madness, I shall now concentrate on the way Niẓāmī handles this attribute of Majnūn. In the legend proper, Majnūn's madness derives from the rejection of his marriage proposal by Laylī's father. Majnūn grows mad and withdraws to the wilderness. Niẓāmī maintains all aspects of Majnūn's madness as they appear in Arabic sources, but as the story progresses he puts less emphasis on Majnūn's madness, while his poetic ability, his ascetic training and above all his wisdom come to the fore. Towards the end of the poem, as we shall see, both Majnūn and the narrator defend Majnūn's sanity by presenting various definitions of madness. The narrator even introduces Majnūn as a wise mystic who has consciously and intentionally chosen to maintain the ascetic life.

2. *Majnūn's possession*

Majnūn's possession is very complex. The complication stems from the concept of *majnūn*, 'possessed by a Jinn' which has been interpreted multifariously in a wide range of contexts in Islamic literatures. In the first half of his '*Uqalā' al-majānīn*', Abū 'l-Qāsim Ḥasan of Nayshābūr presents a philological analysis of the term, emphasising its equivocal meaning.²¹ After suggested various roots such as *janān*, 'heart or soul which is covered by body', *janna*, 'garden covered by trees' and *junn*, 'armour covering the body' for the word *majnūn*, the author concludes that the word means *mastūr*, 'curtained', i.e., one whose intellect is covered.²² This interpretation is also maintained by mystics such as Ibn 'Arabī and 'Abdullāh Anṣārī.²³

²⁰ A. Bombaci in *Laylī and Majnūn by Fuzūlī*, p. 67.

²¹ Ḥasan of Naysabūr, '*Uqalā'*', pp. 39-40.

²² M.W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman*, p. 351.

²³ In his treatise entitled, *Dīl u jān* (in *Sukhanān-i pīr-i Harāt*, p. 8), Anṣārī describes the lover as being curtained. He does not refer to the term *majnūn*, but he does state that the lover is *mastūr*, which implies the same meaning.

Nayshābūrī identifies various types of illnesses as *junūn*, 'madness' including lovesickness, because love takes away the lover's intellect. Nayshābūrī tries to define the nature of lovesickness, as a particular kind of *junūn*, by presenting many reports and anecdotes. The following paraphrases may serve as examples: "An Arab woman, who was asked about love, said: 'Love is pain and madness'; "There is no man with intellect (*ʿāqil*), known for his wit and praised by people, who has not known love's madness/and there is no chivalrous man who can endure the hardship of life, who has not fallen in love." In a number of reports the 'mad' lover defends himself by referring to the beloved's beauty. In one, he rejects the label insane (*junūn*) by saying: "O reproachers, do not reproach me; look at her beautiful face and excuse me. Behold! Is there anyone more beautiful than her? Reproach me when you find someone like her. I am possessed (*junūn*) by love, do not identify me as mad (*junūn*); love-madness is the madness of madness." The author reports that the great mystic Shiblī desires to be mad when he discusses this issue with his disciples. He asks them: "Am I not mad in your view and you sound?" He answers himself: "May God increase both my insanity and your sanity." It is reported that Ḥabīb b. Muḥammad Khālīd al-Wāsiṭī said: "One day, I went to 'Alī b. Hishām and found him crying. I said: 'What has happened?' He said: 'I was passing by a desolate place where I saw a madman who was fettered with chains. He was writhing on the ground and was crying: 'If only love itself could once fall in love, so that it learns what it does to people.'"

Although Nizāmī's presentation of Majnūn's madness includes such views of *junūn*, the poet also adds indigenous Iranian elements. In many Persian romances, the elimination of the intellect is the result of being visited by a supernatural force. This form of insanity is called *ḍiwānagī*, derived from the word for a demon, *ḍiw*. The term alludes to two main aspects of the lover: the loss of the rational faculty and the dichotomy between love and reason. As far as the first point is concerned, Persian poets, including Nizāmī, regard madness as an indispensable aspect of 'loverhood' (*ʿāshiqī*). Unless a man has become frenzied, he cannot call himself a lover. Persian mystics called themselves *ḍiwāna* to show the degree of their selflessness as well as to emphasise their passionate love for God. Although *ḍiwānagī* itself is not one of the conventional Sufi mystical stations (*maqāms*), it is often closely linked with the station of love, which is the highest station in the mystical itinerary. Nizāmī presents Majnūn as an arche-

type of this kind of madness. As we will see, Niẓāmī shows that the lover must first be insane to be willing to bear a 'bad name' (*bad-nāmī*), and to suffer humiliation, rejection, reproach, hunger, isolation and death, all essential qualities of the lover. Mystics regarded such insanity (*ḍiwānagī*) as a sign of love's perfection. Mystical works frequently allude to madness as the perfection of love. In *Rauḍat al-mudhannibīn*, Aḥmad Jām-i Nāmiqī says: "As love reaches perfection, it becomes a companion to madness (*ḍiwānagī*) and all people laugh at the madman. However, although people laugh at him and say something to him, the madman is truly detached from the people, their laughter and cry."²⁴

3. *The limits of reason*

Niẓāmī portrays Majnūn as a mythical figure who embodies *ḍiwānagī* as a sign of the perfection of his love. The poet's presentation of Majnūn has, in fact, exerted such a strong influence on the concept of madness in Persian literature that many subsequent poets take madness as the main requirement of being a lover. It is, indeed, to this type of madness that Ḥāfiẓ refers in the following distich: "On the way to Laylī's quarter where life-threatening dangers lurk/the first condition of taking a step [towards love] is to be a Majnūn."²⁵ In Persian literature in general and particularly in mystical texts, reason (*ʿaql*) is criticised for its shortcomings. Descriptions of reason's limitations occur in chapters on 'God's oneness' (*tauḥīd*) at the beginning of *mathnawī* poems. Reason cannot contain the heavenly mystery and the reality of the beloved, whereas love embraces any possible reality. To display the contrast between love and reason, poets often refer to famous lovers such as Majnūn. In such poetical references, Majnūn is taken as the mythical expression of the contrast between reason and love. He shows how intellect, and all other

²⁴ *Rauḍat al-mudhannibīn wa jannat al-mushtāqīn*, ed. 'A. Fāḍil, Tehran: Pazhūhishgāh, 1372, p. 125.

²⁵ Ḥāfiẓ, *Diwān*, p. 914, gh. 439, l. 3. In the following distich (p. 374, gh. 179, l. 3) Ḥāfiẓ goes even further, and shows that man's nobility amongst God's creation has been procured through madness (*ḍiwānagī*). In his view, it was due to man's madness that he accepted God's Trust: "The heaven was unable to carry the burden of the Trust/the lot of carrying this had fallen on my name, the Demoniac."

faculties, should be in the service of love. The allusions are more to Majnūn's way of life and the way he practises love than to his madness in an ordinary sense. A man with intellect (*'āqil*) is usually criticised in Persian amatory texts. For example, the mystic 'Azīz ad-Dīn Nasafī makes a sharp distinction between a lover (*'āshiq*) and a man with intellect (*'āqil*): "A traveller cannot journey in a hundred times forty days, as far as the lover does in the twinkle of an eye. The *'āqil* journeys in the world, whereas the lover journeys in the here-after; the glance of the *'āqil* during the journey cannot reach the footstep of the lover."²⁶

For mystics, taking leave of intellect means attaining freedom. In fact, many metaphors about the intellect express how mystic lovers desire to be released from its burden. In such metaphors, a sharp contrast is made between love and reason. Reason is seen as the false magic of the Samirian whereas love is Moses' 'white hand.'²⁷ Reason cannot understand love and becomes stuck, like a donkey in the mud. Reason is a gnat that can never hunt an eagle. Reason is like a blind bat that can never see the sun. Reason is compared to a cadaver around which a swarm of insects fly.²⁸ Love is the sun while reason is like other stars; love is fire and reason smoke. Intellect is sometimes described as a chain fettering man to the world or a thick veil preventing him from seeing the beloved. The following anecdote about Luqmān-i Ḥakīm shows that the loss of intellect is the mystic's freedom:

As Abū Sa'īd said: "In the beginning, Luqmān was a conscientious and wakeful man. Later, madness (*junūn*) appeared in him and changed his rank." He was asked: "Luqmān, what happened to your previous rank and what is this?" He answered: "The more servitude I showed, the more I had to serve. I became helpless." I turned to God and said: "Lord, when a servant grows old, his king will set him free. You are a beloved king, set me free because I have grown old in serving you." I heard a voice saying: "O Luqmān, I have set you free." The sign of freedom was that his intellect was taken away.²⁹

²⁶ Nasafī, *Kūlāb insān al-kāmil*, in *Majmū'a*, p. 115.

²⁷ For Moses and the miracle of the White hand see the Koran, 20:23; 28:32.

²⁸ *Ḥadiqa*, Ms., Bagdatli Vehbi, f. 136, 1, l. 9.

²⁹ *Asrār at-tauhīd*, Vol. 1, p. 24.

4. *Majnūn as a rational madman*

Nizāmī's portrayal of Majnūn resembles a rational madman as depicted in mystical poetry. Nizāmī draws on Arabic and Persian sources, but he fashions his own distinct idea of madness, believing that sometimes madness is needed to accomplish one's goal. The poet's view of madness, which has a direct relation to Majnūn, occurs in chapter twelve of the poem. In this passage Nizāmī advises his reader to abandon hypocrisy and to speak candidly from the heart, even if this frankness may be very bold and may be interpreted as insanity:

How long will you be frozen like ice,
like a dead mouse in water.
Behave not gently like a rose;
abandon the duplicity of the violet.
Sometimes one must be a thorn;
madness (*ḍiwānagī*) can serve one's purpose.
A Kurd lost his donkey in the Ka'ba;
he ran in the Ka'ba, cursing:
'There is a long road in this desert;
and my donkey has disappeared; what is the mystery in this?'
Saying this, he looked behind him and
saw the donkey; as he looked at it, he smiled
And said: 'My donkey was lost, and is found
because I hurled curses.'

(ll. 64-70)

The story of this simple Kurd, who by his seemingly unreasonable action accomplishes his goal, prepares the reader for Nizāmī's portrayal of the madman *par excellence* in the Islamic world. The most important aspect of the tale is that the Kurd finds his donkey only when he starts to act courageously. The poet emphasises the bravery of the Kurd who dares to utter invectives in a holy place. The Kurd's action is typical of the behaviour of the '*uqalā' al-majānīn*, or 'rational madmen.' Nizāmī's own conclusion of this tale is reflected in the following three distichs:

If the Kurd had not hurled his curses,
the donkey would have gone, and taken the man's cargo with it.
This village, which is the bastion of those who lack intelligence (*bī-hūshān*) assigns land to the killers of the weak.
It cannot be overcome except with a lion's heart; those with the heart
of a cow (i.e. ignorant people) are unable to be virtuous.

(ll. 71-73)

This tale has an allegorical value as well. The mystery the Kurd mentions may refer to the paradoxical aspect of the intellect: although the intellect is often disdained, it is the very medium that brings man to a destination.³⁰

Not only does Majnūn's view of madness correspond to the opinions of the foolish lovers of God, his attitude and behaviour also reflect the way these mystics behaved. The best known studies of this class of mystics are Abū 'l-Qāsim Ḥasan of Nayshābūr's *'Uqalā' al-majānīn*, and 'Aṭṭār's and Ibn 'Arabī's works.³¹ The rational madmen portrayed in these writings roam alone in the desert, stopping at burial grounds or in isolated and ruined sites. They avoid any intercourse with people and often criticise social norms. They give advice to mystics as well as to rulers, in terse and 'touching verses.'³² When these holy fools approach a populated area, children throw stones at them and force them to leave. They look at God's creation in a pessimistic and disdainful way. The world consists of binary oppositions such as rich and poor, eternity and mortality, justice and injustice, etc. These holy fools are often at war with Him and severely criticise and rebuke God and his creation. They accuse Him of having left them on their own. In their views, whatever happens to them is the work of God, so they bring their complaints directly to God. This is indeed, as H. Ritter has pointed out, what makes their love-relation with God pure, intimate and unique.

Often extreme ascetic practice leads the foolish lovers to madness. Since they have almost literally renounced everything phenomenal (*majāzī*) for the sake of the real (*ḥaqīqī*), their behaviour differs totally from the rest of the society. An important factor to be noted here is that many of these rational madmen do not see themselves as insane and defend their sanity. People who are unable to under-

³⁰ Intellect is often compared to a donkey which becomes stuck in the mud, as in a beautiful story in 'Aṭṭār's *Muṣibat-nama*, p. 339. In his *Laylī and Majnūn*, Jāmī also uses the motif of a man who has lost his donkey, but in a completely different way. See *Haft aurang*, pp. 758-59.

³¹ There are other works that are of interest regarding this subject, but a survey would go beyond the scope of the present study. One author who must be mentioned is Maulānā Fakhr ad-Dīn 'Alī Ṣafī, who devotes two chapters of his *Latā'if al-tawā'if*, (Part 14, chapters 6-7) to the rational madmen.

³² See H. Ritter, *Das Meer*, Kapitel 10, pp. 159-80; idem, "Muslim Mystics Strife with God" in *Oriens*, 1952, Vol. 5, p. 8.

stand their extreme ascetic piety call them mad. This ascetic piety is the coherent theme of Abū 'l-Qāsim Ḥasan of Nayshābūr's book and of 'Aṭṭār's several works. Paradoxically, although they are called madmen, they perfectly fit the general medieval Islamic definition of a 'man with intellect' (*'āqil*). According to the mystic, Yaḥyā b. Ma'ādh Rāzī, there are three kinds of men with intellect: he who renounces the world before the world renounces him; he who builds a grave before he is put into the grave; and he who makes God content before he has reached Him.³³

The prophets are the epitome of the *'āqil*. Abū 'l-Qāsim Ḥasan of Nayshābūr says:

Amongst people, a madman is he who is perturbed, trading insults, rending his garment and throwing stones, or he who speaks against the customs and rites of his own community and acts against their usual practice. It was for these reasons that people called the messengers of God madmen, because the prophets have invited people to a new religion, which was not in harmony with the current practices.³⁴

Citing Koranic verses relating to Noah (54:9), Moses (51:39) and Muḥammad (68:2), Ḥasan of Nayshābūr shows that these prophets were all called *majnūn* by their opponents.³⁵ On the other hand, Ḥasan of Nayshābūr, like Yaḥyā b. Ma'ādh Rāzī, describes an ordinary madman as one who neglects God's command and is deceived by the world and its enticements.

While Majnūn is called *ḍiwāna*, this cannot be taken literally: great mystics such as Luqmān as-Sarakhsī, Uways of Qaran, Shiblī, Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī and many others were also accused of being *ḍiwāna*. Although mystics accepted this predicate, they discussed the nature of their madness to illustrate the ecstatic inspiration of the mystic when seized (*jadhba*) by God. They explain that madness is the perfection of their love and faith. In *Asrār at-tauḥīd*, in which Abū Sa'īd tells about his ascetic training, he adds that people call him *ḍiwāna* because of his extreme austerity. He accepts the epithet on account of the tradition: "Man's faith does not reach perfection until people

³³ *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 318.

³⁴ Ḥasan of Nayshābūr, *'Uqala'*, p. 40.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30. The sin of Noah's wife, Wāliya, was that she had described her husband as Majnūn. See C.E. Bosworth in *EI*, under Nūḥ. See also F. Buhl & A.T. Welch in *EI*, under Muḥammad.

think of him as a *majnūn*.³⁶ In fact, rejecting people and being rejected by people is one of the signs that the mystic traveller is on the right track. Referring to Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. 161/778), the king of Balkh who renounced the world and became a prominent mystic, Mustamlī says: "The community of man cannot find any comfort in them (mystics); they hold them at a distance and flee from them. People expel them from their lands, because mystics have set their feet in the world of reality (*ḥaqīqa*) while people are in the world of illusion (*majāz*). (. . .) People are not cognisant of their states. Some call them madmen, others name them fools, and some call them unbelievers, yet mystics are brighter, smarter and religiously more devoted [than other people]."³⁷

In 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkira*, Uways of Qaran is described by the people as a "stupid madman who has shied away from people."³⁸ The picture of Uways as portrayed by 'Alī Hujwīrī (d. ca. 465/1072), Ḥasan of Nayshābūr and 'Aṭṭār harmonises perfectly with Niẓāmī's depiction of Majnūn. As in the case of Majnūn, people who do not understand Uways call him mad:

A foolish madman who has been alienated from people (. . .). He is a madman who shuns going near inhabited places and avoids communicating with anyone. He avoids eating the foods men eat. He does not know any delight or sorrow. If people laugh, he would cry and if they cry, he would laugh.³⁹

As Uways passed through a neighbourhood, children threw stones at him, a reaction to the madman that occurs frequently in medieval Islamic texts.⁴⁰ He fasted every day and broke his fast with a single dry date. He then collected the stones of the dates and sold them so that he could spend the money for charity. Like Uways, Majnūn lives a solitary life, eats little and gives his possessions to buy the freedom of trapped animals. His co-operation with the old woman in chapter 35 can also be interpreted as a charitable act, because

³⁶ *Asrār at-tauhīd*, Vol. 1, p. 34.

³⁷ *Sharḥ at-ta'arruf*, Vol. 1, p. 87.

³⁸ For an account of Uways of Qaran see *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, pp. 19–27; Ḥasan of Nayshābūr, *'Uqalā' al-majānīn*, pp. 94–99; Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, pp. 99–101.

³⁹ See Hujwīrī's *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 100. In exactly the same words 'Aṭṭār describes Qaranī in *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, pp. 20–1.

⁴⁰ *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 27. The motif of throwing stones at a mad lover also appears in a poem by Bābā Ṭāhir of Hamadān. See *Bābā-Ṭāhir-nāma*, p. 263.

he does not expect any reward from her. In addition, children throw stones at him. However, whereas Uways begs the children to throw only small pebbles at his feet so that he can perform his daily prayer, Majnūn dances with the rhythm of the stones thrown at him, chanting his beloved's name, which makes him forget the pain of the stones: "He repeated: 'Laylī' but received stones/as they threw stones at him he danced." (35:32)

As 'Ayn al-Qudāt says, some mystics deliberately choose the role of madman so that they are released from the trouble of men and the world: "Their intention is to be emancipated from the plague and trouble of the body. They call themselves madmen because the pain and trouble of the people is a heavy burden."⁴¹ Likewise, Majnūn uses madness as an excuse to stay in the desert, in chapters 22, 40 and 50.

The lover often pretends to be mad in order to spare himself the hostilities of the beloved's kinsmen. Majnūn at first frequents Laylī's neighbourhood, but in the course of time he gradually retreats into the desert and remains there. There are, however, a number of stories about the legendary Majnūn using madness to see Laylī, as in the following account by 'Aṭṭār:

One night Laylī said secretly to Majnūn:
 'O you who are deprived of reason because of your love for me,
 Be a stranger to reason as long as you can;
 plunder reason and be a madman.
 Because if you come to me with reason
 you will receive many blows in my alley.
 But when you are considered to be a madman in love
 no one will bother with you.⁴²

Nizāmī's romance contains only limited allusions to Majnūn's derangement. The first explicit reference occurs in chapter fourteen in which the narrator says:

When things became confused to Qays
 he became entrapped in the [magic] circle of love. (. . .)
 All of a sudden his heart collapsed;
 the bag was torn and the donkey fell.⁴³
 Those who were not fallen

⁴¹ *Tamhīdat*, pp. 204-05.

⁴² 'Aṭṭār, *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 249.

⁴³ This a proverbial phrase, meaning a total collapse.

nick-named him Majnūn.
 And he confirmed their word
 because of his wretchedness.
 (ll. 22, 25-7)

Qays is given the name Majnūn because he reveals his love to those who were not 'fallen.' The word in this poem has several connotations.⁴⁴ The narrator condemns those who call Qays Majnūn: his condemnation is significant with regard to Majnūn's madness because he makes a sharp distinction between people who understand Majnūn and those who do not. The people who call him Majnūn are ignorant of Majnūn's state as well as of their own. In many Persian *Laylī and Majnūn* romances, as soon as the question of Majnūn's insanity is raised, the narrator intervenes and says that people who did not understand him called him Majnūn.⁴⁵

The revelation of love is a crucial aspect in 'Udhrite romances.⁴⁶ It is usually considered as the main incentive precipitating the separation of the two young lovers, which eventually has dramatic results. It is not the revelation of love to the beloved, but rather its revelation to the community, which has grave consequences. When Laylī's father finds out about Majnūn's love, he prevents Laylī from seeing Majnūn. The latter turns mad because of this prevention. In Niẓāmī's poem, the lovers patiently try to "cover love's nakedness" but as the narrator expresses it in chapter 14:

The veil tore asunder from every direction,
 and the secret was heard in every alley-way.
 This tale, which was an authentic miracle,
 was an anecdote in every mouth.⁴⁷
 Both persevered in trying to keep the secret from being revealed,

⁴⁴ See *infra*, chapter 9, p. 169.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, Hātifi, *Laylī u Majnūn*, ed. A. Asadollayev, p. 53, l. 1026; Jāmī, *Laylī u Majnūn* in *Haft aurang*, p. 896.

⁴⁶ To announce one's love for a woman in public is regarded as a violation of social norms in Bedouin society. It damages the reputation not only of the beloved but also of her family and tribe. Such a violation may lead into conflicts and even war. Thus revelation of love in such a society would easily be interpreted as a kind of madness. This was one of the reasons for forewarning people to conceal their love. The Zāhirid love-theorist, Ibn Ḥazm (994-1064), even devotes a separate chapter on the "Concealment of the Secret" in his celebrated *Tauq al-ḥamāma* in which he offers several reasons for concealing the secret. The author argues that the lover conceals his love for at least five reasons: he thinks that love is for light-hearted people; to shield the beloved's reputation; to protect the beloved's high social position; fear of the beloved's rejection; and his own embarrassment.

⁴⁷ The word *āya* translated here by miracle also means a.o. 'Koran verse' and 'sign.'

Although the string at the neck of the musk-bag is dry,
its pleasant smell is the proof of the musk.
The wind, which bore the traces of a lover,
lifted the veil from the face of love.
They remained patient in order to try
to cover love's nakedness.

(ll. 12-17)

Some lines further down, the reader witnesses how Majnūn makes another attempt to conceal their love:

He endeavoured to conceal the secret of his heart,
to struggle against the fire in his heart.
But the blood of his liver went up to his heart,
passing the heart, it reached to his brain.

(ll. 38-9)

In this physiology of love, Love's fire boils the blood in the liver (which is the seat of the emotions), until it reaches to the heart and from there to the brain.

The theme of Majnūn's madness is picked up again in chapter seventeen (ll. 5-8), in relation to Majnūn's disgrace and his kinsmen's complaint about his state. They try to advise Majnūn, but as the narrator says "A piece of advice may have a thousand benefits/but when love appears there is no room for imparting counsel." Laylī's father is the first character to refer explicitly to Majnūn's madness, when he meets with Majnūn's father in chapter seventeen (ll. 46-7), and declares:

Unless his essence (*gauhar*) (i.e. brain) is restored,
the tale of marriage is out of the question.
One cannot purchase a damaged pearl;
one cannot string a false pearl (*gauhar*).

When Majnūn hears of the failure of his father's attempt, and his tactless suggestion that Majnūn should marry some other beautiful maiden, he becomes even more mad and rushes to the town singing Laylī's name. Although Majnūn calls himself mad in this scene, he is actually complaining about Laylī's situation, and seeking to take all guilt on himself:

Because I am unworthy of my parents I am in this time
the madman amongst people and the demon of the house. (. . .)
Since it is I who am mad as regards discernment and prudence,
why is the chain fastened on your (i.e. Laylī's) neck?

(18:39,53)

From chapter 36 onwards, little attention is given to Majnūn's madness and his insanity becomes less important than his other character traits. From chapter 43 onwards, the reader is confronted with a Majnūn who lives amongst wild and tame animals as a king, and expresses his views on a wide range of topics such as life, death, fatherhood, love, the nature of a lover, and of the beloved, predestination and benevolence. There is a great transformation not only in the story itself but also in the characters. They become increasingly individualised. They express their opinions about various matters and they are often sharply contrasted with Majnūn. Majnūn's character changes to such an extent that he literally forgets his own self, and who he actually is; he does not recognise his closest kindred such as his father and uncle. In chapter 54:84, Majnūn defends himself against those who label him mad; for example, he says to Salām of Baghdād:

Why are you suspicious of me being intoxicated
or that I am a lustful frenzied lover?

From chapter 55 onwards, even the narrator defends Majnūn's sanity. In this chapter, which has been titled 'On Majnūn's Greatness,' the narrator even seems to reject the image of Majnūn as a *qalandar* Sufi, with whom he might easily be identified. He warns the reader not to confuse Majnūn with such an antinomian mystic. The narrator's condemnation of the *qalandars* might stem from the fact that the ideas of these Sufis were very revolutionary for a twelfth century audience, especially since they ignored and even scorned social norms:

Do not imagine Majnūn's ways
were like those frenzied lovers whom you see nowadays,
Neglecting fasting, prayer and light;
a stranger to intellect, and far from polite.
(ll. 1-2)

The *qalandar* Sufis emerged during Nizāmī's time. In the thirteenth century, their way of life became "inseparable from the spectrum of Sufi life in most countries of Islam."⁴⁸ They adhered to *malāmatiyya*

⁴⁸ J.T.P. de Bruijn, "The Qalandariyyāt in Persian Mystical Poetry, From Sanā'ī Onwards" in *The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London: KNP, 1992, p. 76; see also A.T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*, chapter five. There are also several references to Majnūn as having a 'pierced ear' (*gush-sufta*). Most

doctrines and even went further in changing their outward appearance.⁴⁹ They completely shaved the hair on their heads, including eyebrows, dressed in sacks (*juwāliq*) and led the 'life of a wandering beggar.' Although Majnūn's image is almost identical to the *qalandar*'s life-style, the narrator credits Majnūn a higher status because of his superior knowledge, his poetic genius, and above all his awareness of the world's ephemeral nature and the eternity of the hereafter:

In the world, he was much wiser about the cosmos;
he knew right well the rules (*rusūm*) of the world.
The knower of the hidden knowledge,
who has solved the secrets of heaven.
He has such delightful speech, like a bag of gold,
composer of couplets and love poems, glistening like pearls.
Everyone knows that a madman could not dispense
such pearls without deliberation,
Like a drunkard, he has cast away
the order of the world, and has grasped disorder.
Having become aware of the bitterness of death,
he was preparing his provisions for the road.
If his living was difficult, it was a way
by which he sought to make death easy.
One who has not accustomed himself to travelling (*sayr*)
can leave this monastery only with difficulty.
Whoever holds fast to this home
will die hard at the time of departure.
Majnūn, who sought no companion for the road,
was gently relaxing the bonds,
So that when the king comes up to the prey of life
and says: 'Bring it to me,' he would say: 'Take it.'
(ll. 3-13)

From chapter 56 onwards, Majnūn defends his sanity on any small occasion by pronouncing wise sayings. Like rational madmen, Majnūn

probably such references are at a symbolic level, referring to his servility to the beloved, but when they are taken literally, Majnūn looks indeed like those *qalandars* who pierced their ears, nose and penis. One of the references occurs in chapter 20, l. 28: "He who sat in a corner with a pierced ear, was like a treasure hidden in a corner." For the development of the so-called *qalandari* lyrics see Dāryūsh Šabūr, *Āfāq-i ghazal-i Fārsī*, Tehran: Guftār, 1370, pp. 202-16.

⁴⁹ For the doctrines of *malamatiyya* see F. de Jong, in *EI*, under *Malāmātiyya*; see also H. Algar, in *EI*, under *Malāmātiyya*: 2. In Iran and the Eastern Lands; S. Sviri, "Ḥakīm Tirmidhī and the Malamati Movement in Early Sufism" in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origin to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London: KNP, 1993, pp. 583-613.

complains of the tyranny of fate, man's inability to grasp the secret of the creation, and the world's transitoriness. In this chapter, Majnūn defends himself against Zayd's accusation by asking him:

Why do you call me a madman,
because a madman is the one who is selfish (*khud-kām*).
I am not a demon, rather I enchain the demons;
I am harmless like angels and *hūrīs*.
My gentle nature is not the disposition of a demon;
and this is due to the grace of the sovereign of the world.
It is because of my nice behaviour that these wild and tame beasts
can with their own nature abide calmly with me. (. . .)
A madman on this throne (*i.e.* this world) is he
who firmly ties his tent.⁵⁰
By means of thousands of clever solutions, I myself
am trying to loosen my own bondage.
(ll. 66–9, 77–8)

In a long speech, Majnūn convinces Zayd of his sanity. According to Majnūn, people who engage themselves with worldly interests and forget the creator are insane. In the following lines, he explains why people call him *majnūn*, showing how he differs from ordinary men:

I, who have come to this ruined place (*i.e.* the world),
and have cut off connections with kinsfolk,
will not be a backbiter, will not pretend,
will not live ignorantly, will not play false.
Before death announces, 'depart' and
utters the call for departure, 'arise,'⁵¹
I will have escaped from this tyranny,
I will have taken the road to the grave from this grave (*i.e.* the world)
I see no sign of my being possessed (*majnūnī*) but this;
If a madman (*majnūn*) does this, then I am one.
(ll. 113–17)

To draw a number of conclusions, we can start by stating that it is futile to search *a priori* in Niẓāmī's poem for a pathetic madman who, because of a thwarted love, sings love poems, rends his garment and roams the desert. Niẓāmī's Majnūn shares these characteristics with the legendary Majnūn, yet he has many other traits

⁵⁰ Niẓāmī expresses the same idea in chapter 12:72. The second hemistich can also be translated as follows: "who firms the rope of his tent."

⁵¹ Cf. Ḥāfiz: *jaras faryād midārad ki bar bandid mahmilhā*, "the bell is shouting: 'bind up the litters.'" See *Diwān*, p. 18, gh. 1, l. 4b.

which enrich his character and require a more nuanced view of his madness. Although some couplets refer to Majnūn's madness, Nizāmī does not stress this attribute; he rather uses it as a point of reference in relation to the legendary Majnūn. Majnūn's madness is presented as an essential part of his love: madness, *ḍuḥānagī* is a prerequisite in any lover, particularly in a spiritual love relationship. We have seen that the 'madness' of the rational madman is an unexpected way of attaining one's goal (as in the story of the Kurd and his donkey), that it serves as a pretext for avoiding vexatious people and social encumbrances, as a means of disarming the opposition of kinsmen, and, in this tale, as the introduction to an ascetic discipline which leads to wisdom. In this connection too, Majnūn becomes a prototype of the mad lovers of God. Nizāmī's profound and positive reception of Majnūn's madness had a tremendous impact on the presentation and interpretation of Majnūn's madness by dozens of his imitators.

CHAPTER NINE

“MAJNŪN, THE BLACK STARRED”

*ay 'ishq dil-i marā waṭan sākhla'ī
w-ay hījir kinār-i man chaman sākhla'ī
har āfat-u mihnatī ki dar 'ālam hast
ay charkh magar bārā-yi man sākhla'ī*

*O love, you have made your homeland in my heart,
O separation, you have planted grass at my side;
O Wheel have you made every plague and suffering
Existing in the world for me?¹*

1. *Majnūn's fate*

One central attribute of Majnūn that is repeatedly mentioned throughout the poem is his 'fate.' Nizāmī calls on a complex of concepts borrowed from fields such as theology, cosmology and gnosticism to describe this particular attribute of Majnūn. The early Arabic source, Ibn Qutayba's *Kitāb ash-shi'r*; has only one direct reference to Majnūn's ill-fate, in the words of Laylī, who considers herself responsible for Majnūn's "ill-fortune."² However fate plays an essential role not only in the 'Udhrite romances, in which ill-starred love is the central plot, but also in other love stories. The separated lover often blames and curses his own ill-fortune because he cannot attain union with the beloved. Nizāmī's *Majnūn and Laylī* contains more than forty passages referring to Majnūn being fated, in the words of Majnūn himself or from other characters or the narrator. In this romance, the concept of fate is more complicated because Majnūn's ill fate changes dramatically in chapter 45, as we shall see at the end of this chapter, from the moment that he takes refuge in God and acquiesces to his destiny.

¹ *Nuzhat al-majālīs*, (1366) p. 611, (1375) p. 683, q. 4105.

² See A.E. Khairallah, *Love, Madness*, appendix, p. 138.

2. *Theological concepts of fate*

Nizāmī builds his idea of Majnūn's destiny on a number of theological concepts. *Naṣīb*, 'allotted destiny' is a Koranic term used in the poem; in the religious context, it is usually understood as the divine grace distributed to each individual according to his degree of aptitude (*istīdād*).³ Nizāmī voices this idea repeatedly in his works; for instance, in *Makhzan al-asrār* he states: "In this azure circle, the rank of man (*martaba-yi mard*) is based upon the measure of man."⁴ If a man seeks to alter his own allotted share (*naṣīb*) it will become much worse than it already is, because God has considered everything when He apportioned the *naṣīb*s of each individual. God wants the best for his creatures, even if that 'best' may turn out to be injurious in the view of some individuals. In Nizāmī's opinion, as expressed in *Laylī and Majnūn*, the best way to cope with God's will is to accept one's own portion without any desire to alter it. Man with his partial knowledge, which in itself is derived from God, cannot comprehend the reason behind the will of God. In the introduction of the poem (chapter twelve), Nizāmī voices his idea on man's relation to fate alluding to the concept of *naṣīb* through a series of metaphors:

Attach your heart to your own particular portion (*naṣīb*);
do not think of eating the sustenance of someone else.
Fortune (*bakht*) will turn its back on those who are light of reason,
those who set their feet beyond their own realm.
If a bird does not fly as high as it can,
it flies towards the strings of death.
if a snake does not follow its own path,
it will writhe because of the way he has chosen.
When an ascetic puts on himself a suit of armour,
he will be beaten by his excessive efforts.
When a fox slaps a lion,
you know in whose hands the sword is.⁵
(ll. 93 8)

³ The word *naṣīb* along with its various derivatives occur in the Koran: 2:202; 4:36, 47, 54, 56, 87, 118, 140; 7:35; 11:111; 28:77; 42:19; see also O.N.H. Leaman, in *EL*, under *Luṭf*.

⁴ *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 88, l. 12. The same idea is expressed in *Khusrau and Shirin*, ed. B. Tharwāṭiyān, p. 334, l. 45: "To the degree of one's own measure (*qadr*) can man boast, for a mat-maker has no knowledge of embroidery." See also Laylī and Majnūn, chapter (1:30): "From the portion (*qisma*) of servitude and kingship/You bestow fortune (*daulat*) to whomever You wish."

⁵ Nizāmī orchestrates the same idea by using different metaphors also in his other poems. Time and again, he advises the reader to conform to one's own

The idea that fate is fixed is reflected throughout Nizāmī's writings. In chapter 22:9, Majnūn describes his fate as follows: "I am snared, and the bonds are of iron/what profit is there in taking measures, since my portion (*qisma*) is this?" Again in chapter 56:106, Majnūn refers to his fixed portion: "Since the Lord allotted this as my portion (*naṣīb*)/I have to endure pain."

One's allotted portion includes one's *ajal*, a term denoting both 'the period of life decreed by God for individuals,' and 'the appointed duration of the world.'⁶ Thus when Laylī (62:50) and Majnūn's father (41:18) die, the term *ajal* is used to indicate the completion of their period of life. Like the *naṣīb*, the *ajal* is immutably fixed.

3. The doctrine of *maṣlaḥa*

The concept of *maṣlaḥa*, 'that God intends what is in the best interest of his creatures' is used several times in the poem in relation to Majnūn's ill-fate.⁷ The concept has been variously interpreted in Islamic thought. One of the most comprehensive mystical sources dealing with the concept of *maṣlaḥa* is Mustamlī Bukhārī's *Sharḥ at-ta'arruf*. The gist of Mustamlī's discussion is that "God does whatever He wishes to his creatures, whether there will be any benefit for the creatures or not."⁸ According to Mustamlī, everything, including man's best interest, is based on God's will, and man has no right whatsoever to ask God to alter His will. Mu'tazilites reject this interpretation, arguing that "if one removes the power from someone and ties his hands and feet and then says: 'Walk,' and threatens to beat him if he does not walk, this is unjust (*ẓulm*) and hideous (*zishṭ*)."⁹

allotted portion and not desire more. A desire for the alteration of one's destiny may have catastrophic consequences. In *Khusrau and Shīrīn* (ed. B. Tharwatiyān, p. 284, ll. 110-11) he states: "Water's wholesomeness is agreeable/as long as one can extinguish the riot of the fire//When water passes one's head, it brings damage/even if it be the Water of Life." The same theme with other metaphors occurs in *Iqbāl-nāma*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, pp. 26-9.

⁶ See I. Goldziher and W. Montgomery Watt in *EI*, under *Adjal*; also compare M. Abdesslem in *EI*, under *Mawt*.

⁷ An abstract noun deriving from the Arabic verb *ṣalaḥa* (or *ṣaluḥa*), meaning "to repair or improve." See Majid Khadduri in *EI*, under *Maṣlaḥa*. Also look 'A.A. Dihkhuda's *Lughat-Nāma*, under *Maṣlaḥat*.

⁸ *Sharḥ at-ta'arruf*, Vol. 2, p. 471.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 494.

The Mu'tazilites therefore said that God is obliged to intervene in human affairs, because men's best interests are served by God's interference. Ghazālī sharply refutes this by arguing that God is not obliged to do anything, because he does not bear any responsibility for His actions. God performs His actions on the basis of His majesty (*jalāl*) and beauty (*jamāl*), and every action in the world flows from God's sovereign will.¹⁰

Maṣlaḥa plays an important role in *Laylī and Majnūn*,¹¹ where it is related to the popular theme of the parents who ask God for a child. The theme can be found at the beginning of a number of romances in *The Thousands and One Nights* and in *Samak 'Ayyār* by Farāmarz al-Arrajānī. What makes this theme conspicuous in *Laylī and Majnūn* is Nizāmī's philosophical treatment, demonstrating that the benefits we most desire may not be in accordance with God's ultimate purpose. There is no similar treatment of this theme in polite literature before Nizāmī, but in later romantic *mathnawīs* it became a favourite, as we can see in Waḥshī Bāfiqī's (d. 991/1583) *Nāzīr and Manzūr*, 'Aṣṣār Tabrīzī's (d. 778/1376) *Mihr and Mushtarī* (*The Sun and Jupiter*), Jamālī of Delhi's *Mihr and Māh*, Fatāhī of Nayshāpūr's (d. 828/1449) *Husn and Dil*, Khājū Kirmānī's *Gul and Naurūz*, and Jāmī's *Salamān and Absāl*. In 'Aṣṣār's poem, a king and his vizier who both desire a child go to a mystic for a magical favour. The mystic gives them a miraculous loaf of bread through which they can fulfil their desires. In Jamālī's poem, which is an imitation of 'Aṣṣār's romance, a childless king goes to a mystic, who prays that he may have a child.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

¹¹ Nizāmī dwells on the term *maṣlaḥa* in his other works as well. For instance, in the preamble to the *Sharaf-nāma*, in which Nizāmī praises God, he discusses a number of religio-philosophical issues, including the nature of man, the question of good and evil, and *maṣlaḥa*. As far as the nature of man is concerned, he holds that God chose in pre-eternity to allot the attributes of good and evil to the nature of men: "When You created my nature from earth,/you kneaded it with purity and impurity//Whether I be good or evil in my nature/it was your decision (*qaḍā'*) which inscribed them upon me." (*Sharaf-nāma*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 12) God's hand is present in every event whether it takes place in this or the other world. The only way to redeem oneself and to lead an eternal life is to submit oneself entirely to destiny. Man should strive to harmonise his will to God's best interests: "O You who wish the best interests, *maṣlahat-khāh*, for me/I hope that the direction, in which I am taking strides, may lead to *maṣlaḥa*//Show me a way so that at the end of the road/You be content and I be redeemed//My nature allows me no other recourse//but not turning my face away from my destiny." *Sharaf-nāma*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 13.

Bāfiqī too follows the footprints of 'Aṣṣār: in his poem, a king and his vizier are travelling in the desert when they see a mystic in a ruined building. The mystic gives the king a pomegranate and a quince to the vizier. They consume the fruits and each later sires one child. Hātifi's and Khājū's poems follow Niẓāmī's treatment, in which the father prays to God for a child without any intermediary.

In *Laylī and Majnūn*, 'Āmirī, Majnūn's father, performs pious deeds such as distributing alms so that God, in return, may grant him a son, who may then become his heir and keep his memory alive. Niẓāmī portrays 'Āmirī as someone who regards charity and alms-giving as a proper religious action to change his own destiny and to influence God's will. 'Āmirī's preoccupation with an heir is maintained to the last encounter between father and son. In chapter 39, 'Āmirī concludes his long admonitory speech to Majnūn in the following words:

O soul of your father, come, hurry up,
do grasp [the point] before your father's life expires.
Make your cosy dwelling in your own paternal home,
before I have breathed my last breath,
So that I can die when death reaches me
and be sure that someone is in my place;
So that when death makes me depart from this abode,
there will be an heir in my place.
Neither foe nor friends approve of the fact
that when I am dead, you will be missed at my death-bed.
A stranger may appear out of the blue
who will steal all my wealth.
(ll. 89-94)

'Āmirī's desire is to know that his wealth and memory will be preserved: for this he needed an heir, and for this he wishes Majnūn to lead a normal life, and to marry someone other than Laylī.

Niẓāmī implies that 'Āmirī's acts of benevolence stem from his 'excessive desire' (*ṭama'*) to have a child. As Franz Rosenthal has pointed out, the word *ṭama'* suggests: "actively desiring, tinged with [a/the] negative connotation of greed."¹² In religious writings, especially in mystical texts, people are often warned to abandon *ṭama'*. The mystic Bū 'l-Qism Bishr Yāsīn is said to have advised Abū

¹² Franz Rosenthal, *Sweeter than Hope: Complaint and Hope in Medieval Islam*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1983, pp. 69-71.

Sa'īd: "O Bū Sa'īd, try to remove *ṭama'* from your acts, because purity does not correspond with *ṭama'*, and an act inspired by *ṭama'* is injurious whereas an act inspired by purity is servitude."¹³ 'Āmirī is presented as a character who is unaware that there are things beyond man's control. As we shall see later, Majnūn confronts his father with the irreversibility of destiny several times in the poem.

'Āmirī's desire is considered by Nizāmī as a violation of the Islamic virtue of acquiescence (*riḍā*), an important concept in Islamic culture which religious scholars have treated as a duty. Almost all Sufi text-books devote a chapter to elaborating various facets of this virtue: its attainment is one of the stations in the spiritual journey. One of the popular sayings about acquiescence is from Junayd: "acquiescence is the elimination of one's will."¹⁴ In the *Tarjuma-yi risāla-yi Qushayriyya*, it has been mentioned: "acquiescence is that which is not in disagreement with the divine Decree (*ḥukm*) and predestination (*qadā'*)."¹⁵ Man must comply with the will of God and be content with desirable and undesirable aspects of life. Acquiescence is often related to the story of Adam who desired to attain his own will: as soon as he set one step beyond God's will, he became naked, separated from his mate, and bereft of his position, and he was banished from the garden of Eden. Acquiescence is usually paired with predestination. Dhū 'n-Nūn the Egyptian (d. 246/860) is reported to have said that "acquiescence is the delight of the heart in enduring the bitterness of predestination."¹⁶ In pre-eternity God wrote on the Preserved Tablet (*lauḥ-i mahfūz*) the destiny of each individual along with the knowledge of whether men would be satisfied with it. Man cannot know what is behind God's will.

In chapter thirteen, 'Āmirī is determined to alter his destiny by undertaking charitable deeds:

He was generous for the sake of his own desire (*ṭama'*)
bestowing money on needy men. (. . .)
He was unaware that the delay in his having a child
was coloured with the hue of best interest.
Whatever you desire and do not attain,

¹³ *Asrār at-tauḥīd*, Vol. 1, p. 19.

¹⁴ Mustamlī Bukhārī, *Sarḥ at-ta'arruf*, Vol. 3, pp. 1309–1318. See also *Tarjuma-yi risāla-yi Qushayriyya*, p. 300.

¹⁵ *Tarjuma-yi risāla-yi Qushayriyya*, p. 296.

¹⁶ Mustamlī Bukhārī, *Sarḥ at-ta'arruf*, Vol. 3, p. 1311. A similar saying is given by 'Aṭṭār in his *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 133.

is not beyond the limits of best interest.

The function of all good and evil is in accordance

with the course of best interests, if you examine it closely. (. . .)

The beginning of the thread is invisible, in the hidden world;

What you see as a lock, may turn out to be a key;

What a helpless race is the human being,

a heap of dust, which once blown in the air, goes with the wind.

(ll. 15, 18-21, 24-5)

4. *Majnūn's free will, ikhtiyār*

Majnūn raises the issue of free will several times in the poem. Although he often submits to his pre-ordained fate, Majnūn complains in frustration about man's inability to possess free will. He does not limit himself to bemoaning his own fate, but also cleverly compares his wretched condition to that of humanity in general, to win the reader's sympathy. The term *ikhtiyār* is derived from the root *khayr*, 'good' usually denoting the power of choice and free will. It is not a Koranic term, although the eighth form of the verb is used to refer to a divine act.¹⁷ One of God's epithets is *al-mukhtār*, 'the Unconstrained', derived from the same root. Majnūn's opinion about *ikhtiyār* resembles the Ash'arite tenets advocated by Aḥmad Ghazālī.¹⁸ Unlike Shi'ites and Mu'tazilites, who believed that man has free will and responsibility for his own actions, and would be judged by God according to His Justice, the Ash'arites clung to the idea that man is entirely dependent on God and there is no room for human volition.

Treatises on love have discussed whether the lover has any control or free will in matters of love. For instance, in chapter 73 of the *Sawānīḥ*, Aḥmad Ghazālī remarks that not only is love itself a compulsion (*jabr*), love's decrees (*aḥkām*) which are derived from love, are all compulsions. Free will has no place in the realm of love. The lover's condition is entirely subject to compulsion (*jabr*) and the poison of the beloved's wrath (*qahr*). Using a gaming imagery, Ghazālī believes that the lover should be a backgammon board, waiting to see which

¹⁷ L. Gardet in *EI*, under *Ikhtiyār*; also compare N. Pūrjawādī, *Sawānīḥ: Inspirations from*, p. 113.

¹⁸ See W.M. Watt in *EI*, under *Ash'ariyya*, and *Ash'ari*, Abū 'l-Ḥasan.

dice the beloved chooses to place on the board. He adds: "Whether the lover agrees to it or not, a dice will appear on the board."¹⁹

Furthermore, Ghazālī points out that affliction results when the lover, in his imagination, desires free will. The lover should eliminate his imagination so that life becomes easier for him. The lover should not imagine that he can undertake anything based on his own free will, because in matters of love there is no room for free will.²⁰ In Ghazālī's view, falling in love is not based on free will. He shows this by the story of a furnace-stoker (*gulkhantāb*) who has fallen in love with a king. The king wants to punish the man but his wise vizier dissuades him, saying: "It is not befitting for you to punish a person on account of something which is beyond the domain of free will (*ikhṭiyār*)." Ghazālī's idea of love as a force beyond man's control can be traced back to the day of *Alast* in pre-eternity, when God spoke to Adam's potential descendants: "Am I not thy Lord?" They answered, "Yea, we witness thou art!" (7:171). This covenant is interpreted by Ghazālī, and in Sufism in general, as a day on which Adam's children discerned love on God's face. Thus, when they beheld Him with all of His attraction (*jadhbā*), they could say nothing but "Yea." Ghazālī points out that this affirmation stems from the fact that Adam's progeny were totally immersed in God's lustrous beauty and grandeur, and eventually love branded the mark of "Am I not thy Lord?" upon them. Here Ghazālī asks whether, when Adam's Children said "Yea," they uttered it by their own free will (*ikhṭiyār*), or were they rather overwhelmed by God's magical attraction?

Ghazālī's idea on free will and love has thoroughly influenced Persian concepts of love. For instance, Sanā'ī states: "Love and the beloved are not according to free will; love is not what you reckon it to be."²¹ In *Lawā'ih*, Nāgaurī devotes chapters 198–202 to free will and love. He perceives that free will derives from the beloved's wrath, offered to the lover in the cup of deception. She gives the cup on the pretext of quenching the lover's thirst, but the more he drinks, the thirstier he becomes. The author adds that all man's pain

¹⁹ *Sawānīh*, p. 103, *fasl* 73, (I), ll. 2–6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 104, *fasl* 73, (II), ll. 11–12. Poets often compare human beings to pieces on a chessboard that are moved involuntarily. See for instance, 'Attār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 273, ll. 5–12.

²¹ *Ḥadīqa*, p. 328; the line does not occur in Ms Bagdatli Vehbi in the section on love.

and sorrow are caused by his free will. In matters of love, he is fortunate (*bakhtiyār*) who has no free will (*ikhtiyār*). In the same way as Ghazālī, Nāgaurī assumes that the perfection of love can be achieved when the lover bids farewell to his own free will, even if he finds himself in a fatal condition. When a lover who is drowning is asked whether he wants to be saved, he answers: "No." When he is then asked: "Do you want to drown?" Again he says: "No." People say: "What do you want then?" He answers: "No desire of mine could attain to the beloved's desire. I want whatever she wants."²²

Like Majnūn, Sufis such as Shaykh 'Abdullāh Anṣārī complained in the *Munājāt* (*Prayers*) about man's impotence and frailty, beseeching God to cast a glance on men's condition and guide them to the right path. In the same way that Majnūn calls himself 'fallen' (*uflāda*), many Sufis use the word to describe their state.²³ The connotations are not only those of having fallen from the primordial spiritual abode to the "lowest of the low" (Koran, 95:3), but also of being humble, weakened and oppressed.

In chapter 22:7-10, when Majnūn answers his father, he refers to his impotence and to man's vulnerable position in the creation in general; his ideas are in accordance with those of Sufis:

But, what can I, the black-faced, do?
I am not fallen in this alley (world) by myself.
Thus, since I am not on my own in this abode,
I have no power of choice (*ikhtiyār*) by myself, as you know.
I am in bondage and the bonds (*bands*) are of iron;
of what use are efforts, since destiny decrees thus?
I cannot free myself from this bond;
one cannot put off this burden (*bār*) by oneself.

By referring to the 'burden' (*bār*), Majnūn stresses man's capacity to carry the heavy burden entrusted to him at the dawn of creation. The burden is God's 'Trust' (*amāna*), which is mentioned in the Koran (33:72): "We offered Our Trust to the heavens, to the earth, and to the mountains, but they refused the burden and were afraid to receive it. Man undertook to bear it, but he has proved a sinner and a fool." There is a wide range of ideas about the nature of the Trust. Some mystics such as 'Azīz Nasafī, Aḥmad Ghazālī, Najm

²² *Lawā'ih*, pp. 135-37.

²³ *Laylī u Majnūn*, 51:18.

ad-Dīn Dāya and Rūzbihān Baqlī take the Trust as love.²⁴ Others interpret it as reason, the awareness of responsibility, free will, performing religious duties such as daily prayer, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca and so forth. In *Risāla-yi parda-yi hijāb* (*Treatise on the Veil of Veiling*) ascribed to Anṣārī, he complains: "O Merciful Lord, when you offered the Trust, the mountain fled away; therefore the burden became my share, and your manifestation that of the mountain." The allusion is to Mount Sinai, which could bear God's revelation. And again in the *Risāla-yi dil u jān* (*Treatise on the Heart and the Soul*), he complains: "O Lord, if I am not faithful to your Trust, you knew how I was when Thou put the burden upon me."²⁵ Majnūn interprets the burden as affliction and calls himself, *balā-kash*, 'he who endures affliction.' This appellation has been a favourite epithet for mystics and occurs frequently in mystical love poetry.²⁶

Majnūn complains of his oppressed condition and his inability to change his fate:

I am not the only one who is oppressed;
 what eye has not seen hundreds of men such as I?
 A shadow does not fall into a pit on its own;
 the moon does not reach its zenith on its own.
 From the mammoth figure of the elephant to the wings of a tiny gnat,
 there is nothing which escapes from this oppression.
 If the course of events was according to the will of man,
 no one would have desired to experience what is contrary to his own
 will. (. . .)
 My ill-fortune (*bakht-i bad*) is looking for me,
 how can one wash the ill-fate from oneself.
 If there had been someone on this road to stretch out his helping
 hand,
 I would have been the sun or the moon.
 Since we lack the power of choosing (*ikhtiyār*),
 it is not our work to mend the course of events.
 I, who am suffering affliction (*balā-kash*) cannot live happily;
 who is the one who has a merry heart?
 (ll. 13-6, 18 21)

²⁴ Najm ad-Dīn Dāya in his *Mirṣād al-'ibād* conceives the Trust as *bār-i nāz-i ma'shūqī-yi ma'shūq*, "the burden of the amorous needlessness of the Beloved's beloved-hood." See *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, p. 49, English trans., p. 74.

²⁵ *Risāla-yi dil u jān*, in *Sukhanān-i pīr-i Harāt*, p. 72; 4.

²⁶ For instance, Ḥāfiz uses at least three times the term *balā-kash* in his *ghazals*. See Ḥāfiz, *Dīwān*, ed. P. Nātil Khānlārī, p. 326, gh. 155, l. 4; p. 483, gh. 233, l. 5; p. 658, gh. 321, l. 6.

5. *Cosmogonical concepts signifying Majnūn's fate*

In addition to theological concepts, Niẓāmī uses cosmological abstractions to depict Majnūn's ill-fate. His knowledge of astrology and astronomy is part of his poetic profession. Poets of the Azarbāyjānī school such as Falakī, Abū 'l-'Alā' Ganjawī and Khāqānī were particularly interested in cosmology. Niẓāmī's cosmology is in broad agreement with the ideas of the medieval Islamic cosmologists, who studied the heaven and its elements to acquire a better understanding of man and the wisdom of the Creator. Niẓāmī's description of heaven should not be compared to the science of Islamic cosmology as we find it in Bihrūz Tharwatiyān, because the poet tries to present a natural phenomenon poetically rather than to precisely delineate the motion of the planets, the stars and their various attributes and interrelationships.²⁷

Niẓāmī uses synonymous words for 'sky' and 'world' to represent Majnūn's ill fate and the dominance of heaven over earth. The Wheel (*charkh*) is one of the active agents of heaven and occurs several times in the poem; it is held responsible for Majnūn's ill-fortune. Majnūn's father blames the 'Wheel' for his son's bad luck in chapter 39:46: "The ruthless *charkh* has shot an arrow/and has publicly shed your blood." In chapter 16:29, when the Wheel finds out that Laylī and Majnūn have fallen in love and that they take satisfaction in merely looking at each other from a distance, this serves as an 'efficient cause' (*biḥāna*) prompting it to cut off the glance through which the lovers convey their feelings:²⁸ "When the Wheel (*charkh*), moved by this prompting, rose in opposition/it removed the messenger of the glance." Beginning with the Zoroastrian concept of heaven as a 'stony sky,' Niẓāmī creates various images that combine the stone and heaven.²⁹ He shows how the merciless Wheel in its motion constantly throws stones on the fragile glass of life.

Gītī, denoting the terrestrial or material world, is another agent of destiny, which plays an active role in the poem. For instance, it chooses a name for Salām in chapter 54:5: "The world (*gītī*) had

²⁷ See the introduction of *Khusrau u Shirin*, ed. B. Tharwatiyān, pp. 11-2.

²⁸ Ringgren observes that *biḥāna* is "the apparent instrument of predestination, the things and events, through which it is carried out." See *Fatalism in Persian Epics*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1952, p. 91.

²⁹ For the Zoroastrian view of the sky see A. Tafazzoli in *EIr*, under Āsmān.

named him Salām/and good fortune had saluted (*salām*) him.” After the death of Majnūn’s mother in chapter 50, the narrator delivers a long commentary expressing his fatalism, using a range of synonyms to refer to destiny: Wheel, Time, World, and firmament:

Everyday the world (*jahān*) is robbing lives;
 judge fairly, what kind of an infidelity is this!
 The world (*gīfī*), which has no intention of fidelity,
 is as if it has acquaintance with no one.
 This Time (*rūzgār*), which is the breaker of promises,
 is like a farmer who sows seeds:
 It initially sows two or three seeds,
 and when the seeds have sprouted, it reaps them again.
 Every night it will kindle a lamp,
 and will then brand a mark of smoke on its soul.
 As dawn exhales, time will blow a wind on it,
 so that dawn dies in the same way that it was born from it (i.e. time).
 The Wheel (*gardūn*) on which a talisman has been branded,
 is playing with us with the same fire.
 As long as the feet are bound in the knot of firmament (*ḡalak*)
 your place will still be in the knot, wherever you may go.
 The knot can only be unravelled,
 when you dismount from the four horses.³⁰
 (ll. 69–77)

6. *Time, zamān, zamāna as agents of destiny*

Time as an agent of heavenly powers plays an important part in Persian epics in general and particularly in *Laylī and Majnūn*, where time pervades every element of the story. The Persian word, *zamān*, ‘time’ as an agent of destiny is rooted in the pre-Islamic monotheistic and ideological system of Zurvanism, a dissident branch of Zoroastrianism that flourished during the Sasanian dynasty.³¹ The ultimate

³⁰ An allusion to the Four Elements.

³¹ See J. Duchesne-Guillemin, “Zoroastrian Religion” in *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 3 (2), 1985, pp. 898–902; see also pp. 938–39 and 873–74. See also M. Schwartz, “The Religion of Achaemenian Iran” in *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 2, 1985, pp. 677–78, which deals with Zurvān as a minor God of Zoroastrianism. See also Alessandro Bausani, *Religion in Iran: from Zoroaster to Baha’ullah*, trans. J.M. Marchesi, New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2000, pp. 42–5. For the possible relation between the Greek God Chronos (‘Time’) and Zurvan see H. Ringgren, *Fatalism*, pp. 43–8 and for the connection between the Indian concept of “Kala” and Persian Zamān, see idem, pp. 35–43. On the concept Time see S.H. Nasr, *An Introduction*

source of being in Zurvanism was Zurvān, Time, which was the creator of both good and evil, and Ohrmazd and Ahriman. 'Time' with its various Persian and Arabic synonyms defines the course of man's destiny. The Arabic loan-word *dahr*, 'infinitely extended time,' does not occur in Nizāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn* in the sense of destiny, but other Arabic words such as *daurān*, 'cycles' and *sayr*, 'travelling' are treated in the same way as the Persian *zamān*, *zamāna*, and *rūzgār*, all alluding in one way or another to the power of destiny.³² Although both Persian and Arabic poets often say that *zamān* is responsible for man's fate, the idea was severely condemned by a Koranic verse, reproaching unbelievers who said: "It is Time that destroys us" (45:23).³³

Destiny, in the guise of time, reveals its power with Majnūn's birth. In the section in which Majnūn's wet-nurses are described, the only wet-nurse to be identified is *daurān*, meaning a 'cycle of time,' which nurtured Majnūn "by the authority of a wet-nurse and with the milk of affection." The word *zamān* in the sense of fate recurs in various parts of the poem.³⁴ In chapter 47:53, Laylī advises Majnūn in her letter: "Do not follow the orbit of the world's cycle/for this Wheel revolves from one moment to another." In his encounter with Naufal, Majnūn complains of his fate: "Majnūn chanted some couplets on love/in a complaint against fate (*zamāna*)." (chapter 28, l. 2)

Rūzgār, a synonym of Time in the sense of fate, has a power that dominates everything in the romance. In his *Sharaf-nāma*, Nizāmī calls *rūzgār* the 'teacher' (*āmūzgār*) of good and bad (*khūb u bad*). It can cause man to fall into an unfathomable pit, or elevate him to the roof of heaven. The only way to remain unharmed is to be in harmony with *rūzgār*.³⁵

to *Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, pp. 62-3. See also G. Böwering, "Ideas of Time in Persian Sufism" in *Classical Persian Sufism*, pp. 199-233.

³² W.M. Watt in *EL*, under *Dahr*. For a linguistic approach to the concept of time in classical Arabic see Franz Rosenthal, *Sweeter Than Hope*, pp. 1-58.

³³ See Th. Nöldeke, in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, under *Arabs*, p. 661.

³⁴ See, for instance, chapters 39:84 and 41:32 respectively: "How long will you lament over *zamāna*/to run and to receive a scourging; My time is approaching, submit to the revolution of time (*gardish-i rūzgār*)."

³⁵ "It is better to have this wildness tamed out of you/because a hard-mouthed steed will receive blows. For the entire passage on *rūzgār* see *Sharaf-nāma*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, pp. 520-21.

7. *Stars and lovers*

Stars and the planets play a significant role as agents of destiny in medieval Persian epics, especially in romances. Astrology and astronomy, which are denoted by a single term in both Arabic (*ṣināʿat an-nujūm*) and Persian (*sitāra-shināsi*), are based on the belief that all the changes occurring in the sublunary world, the Aristotelian 'generation and corruption' (*kaun wa-fasād*), depend on the character, motion, and power of the heavenly bodies. The influence of the stars depends on their individual nature and their positions in respect to the earth and the other stars. The stars and planets were seen as agents of God, which influenced all worldly events. Each planet had its own temperament, colour, and course. Some planets were regarded as beneficent and some were maleficent. Destiny was linked to the course of the stars, and astrology could predict their course and their effect on the events of this world. The happiness of lovers depended on the connections and interactions of stars. Therefore, astrologers would identify an auspicious time for a marriage. In *Wīs and Rāmīn*, when Wīs is about to marry her brother Wīrū, astrologers are summoned to choose a propitious day for their marriage.³⁶ An exposition of the planetary signs accompanying births and marriages provided the romantic poet with an opportunity to give flash-forward information, to create tension and suspense, and to divert the course of the story in a credible fashion. Astrology was used in relation to important events such as the birth of the individual, the commencement of a reign, forecasting the date of death, and destiny.

As a *poeta doctus*, Nizāmī was familiar with the arts of divination and astrology, but he condemns both.³⁷ In chapter 40:62–4 of *Khusrau and Shirīn* Nizāmī says:

There are many omens which are no more than a play,
when the star has moved, the omens become good.
How well did the master of meanings divine:

³⁶ *Wīs u Rāmīn*, chapter 14, p. 33, ll. 18–25.

³⁷ The art of divination occurs numerous times in Nizāmī's work. In *Sharaf-nāma* (ed. W. Dastgirdī, pp. 143, 150), for instance, Alexander on his way to Persia sees two partridges fighting. He regards one of them as himself and the other as Darius. Alexander's partridge wins the fight, but it is not long before an eagle swoops down on the victorious partridge and takes it away. In *Khusrau and Shirīn*, in chapter 52:57–8, Nizāmī says: "No one divines an ill omen (*fāl-i bad*) in matters of love/and if he does, he will not divine it for himself."

"divine a good omen for yourself and you will see [it come]."
If you are pessimistic, the divination will be inauspicious,
when you say: "good," good will present itself to you.³⁸

In *Laylī and Majnūn*, Nizāmī shows his profound knowledge of astrology and condemns it in a biographical note in chapter 4:45–6. He says that he has read many "astronomical manuscripts," but he could not find any sound ideas in any of them. In the same chapter (4:60,62), he admonishes the reader not to rely on the heavens. In his view, man can find the right path by being aware of his own insignificance and shortcomings (*ʿajz*), in relation to the impeccable and perfect Creator:

Do not grasp the chains of the spheres (*ḥalāk*)
for this chain, too, has an end. (. . .)
Far beyond this chain, there is a resting place,
and the road to it is [recognising one's] shortcomings.

In Nizāmī's view, man should not rely on the heavens (*ḥalāk*), which according to the Koran, are transitory and are themselves the handiwork of God. Nizāmī says that sometimes the heaven makes man the king of animals, and at other times, the "clay of the potter's pot." He goes on: "*Ḥalāk*, which has the hue of musk, is your enemy, and although its eyes are brimming with pearls, its heart is filled with stones," meaning that although outwardly it shows sympathy, it is ruthless by nature. In *Makhzan al-asrār*, Nizāmī emphasises that heaven drinks blood.³⁹ In *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, the poet takes heaven to be the judge of the world, a mirror reflecting good and bad deeds of man: "Heaven is the mirror of justice and is befitting/that whatever it sees from you, it will reflect it."⁴⁰

The only way to escape the blows of heaven is to escape from its orbit, i.e. to elevate oneself above heavens:

Be not the target of the starry sphere;
be not on the orbit of this circle.

³⁸ *Khusrau u Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwāṭiyān, 40:62 4.

³⁹ *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 170.

⁴⁰ *Khusrau u Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwāṭiyān, 99:29. A similar image is used in *Haft paykar* (ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 56, ll. 8–9) to describe the cruelty of heaven: "Heaven has a two-handed pair of scales/on one tray is the stone and on the other jewels//From the paired scales of this two-coloured world/sometimes jewels and sometimes stones proceed."

If you reach beyond the line of night and day,
you will transcend the orbit of the spheres.⁴¹

Nevertheless, Niẓāmī describes his protagonists' astral omens in his *Sharaf-nāma*, *Khusrau and Shīrīn* and *Haft paykar*, and at several places in *Majnūn and Laylī*. One of these allusions occurs in chapter 46:50, where Laylī calls Majnūn 'black-starred' (*sīyah-sitāra*): "I am a thousand times more enamoured (*shīfta*)/than that enamoured black-starred." In a long passage in chapter 45, Majnūn communes with the stars and begs them to alter his ill-fortune. However, having admitted his own shortcomings (*ʿajz*), and realising that the stars cannot do anything for him, Majnūn turns to God for help. In this scene, Niẓāmī displays his rare poetic genius and his thorough knowledge of astrology. Majnūn is no longer presented as a distraught Arab boy but rather as a Persian sage of the twelfth century. His communion with the stars occurs as a continuation of a depiction of the night, one of the most superb nocturnal descriptions in classical Persian literature. The scene itself and its composition of elements, its stars and constellations, is not Niẓāmī's own device. It is an artistic and imitative melange of two beautifully depicted scenes. The first is Gurgānī's "description of the night" in chapter 29 of *Wīs and Rāmīn*, in which he presents a sky containing all the constellations of fixed stars in the astrological pantheon.⁴² In this passage, the narrator foresees that the union of king Maubad and Wīs will be ill-omened. The dark night is the background to the scene in which Wīs' mother gives her daughter away to the king, against Wīs' wish.⁴³ In Niẓāmī's treatment, the stars are not merely represented as luminous bodies in heaven, but also as gleaming windows to the world of light outside our formal world, a view which was elaborately developed by Niẓāmī's contemporary, Suhrawardī in his *Hikmat al-ishrāq* (*The Philosophy of the Orient of Light*).⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 133, ll. 4-5.

⁴² Paul Kunitzsch, "The 'description of the Night' in Gurgānī's *Vis and Rāmīn*" in *Der Islam*, 1982, 59, pp. 93-110.

⁴³ For an interpretation of this scene see J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, p. 190. See also J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, pp. 103-07. A night scene which presages an event also occurs in Firdausi's *Shāh-nāma*. For a detailed analysis of this scene see D. Davis, *Epic and Sedition: the Case of Ferdowsi's Shāhnameh*, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1992, pp. 167-74.

⁴⁴ See S.H. Nasr, "The World View and Philosophical Perspective of Ḥakīm Niẓāmī Ganjawi" in *The Muslim World*, Vol. 82, July-October, 1992, pp. 191-200.

The second element Nizāmī uses is the Koranic treatment of patriarch Abraham's communion with the stars (6:75-9). In this scene, when night spreads its darkness over the earth, a star comes into Abraham's view which he mistakes for the creator; Koran commentators, such as Abū Bakr Sūrābādī, have identified this star with Venus.⁴⁵ However, when the moon rises, Abraham takes her as the Creator, and again, when the sun rises, Abraham thinks that the sun must be the Creator due to the splendour of its light. When sunset comes, he realises that there must be an eternal creator, who has fashioned all of these appearing and vanishing entities. In his *Mishkāt al-anwār* (*The Niche for Lights*) Muḥammad Ghazālī explains that there are degrees of light, from the dim light of a star to the bright light of the sun, and to God as the Light of Lights from which all lights emanate.⁴⁶ His symbolic interpretation of lights is that they allude to man's moral and mystical consciousness of his own soul as well as to his knowledge of God's existence as the Light *par excellence*. Moreover, by making the stars appear to Abraham, God tested Abraham and taught him to be firm in his belief in God and avoid worshipping any other deity.⁴⁷

In *Majnūn and Laylī*, stars appear as night falls, and Majnūn implores them to change his fortune. He first humbly begs Venus and then Jupiter, both of them representing good fortune and luck in Persian literature:⁴⁸

⁴⁵ See *Qisas-i Qur'an-i maḥīd: tafsīr-i Abū Bakr 'Alīq-i Nayshābūrī mashhūr ba Sūrābādī*, ed. Y. Mahdawī, Tehran: Dībā, third edition, 1975, p. 73. See also Muḥammad b. Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, Pers. trans. A. Pāyanda, Vol. 1, Tehran: Asāṭīr, p. 172.

⁴⁶ See Al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, trans. W.H.T. Gairdner, London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1924, pp. 71-73.

⁴⁷ Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī interprets Abraham's communion with the stars as the marriage between the world of essence (*dhāt*) and the world of form (*ṣūra*). The stars are taken as symbolic representations of the black-eyed virgins of paradise. See *Aghāz wa anjām*, ed. H. Ḥassanzāda Āmulī, Tehran: Islamic Culture and Propaganda Ministry, 1374, pp. 69-70. For Venus' identification with 'Uzza, one of the jāhiliyya goddesses of the Arabs see Th. Nöldeke, in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, under Arabs, p. 660.

⁴⁸ Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī of Khārazm, *Kitāb at-taḥḥīm li-awā'il ṣanā'at at-tanjīm*, ed. J. Humā'ī, Tehran: Bābak, 1362, pp. 365-7, for the stars' influence on man see chapter five, pp. 316-539. Here Bīrūnī explains that "Saturn and Mars are inauspicious at all moments: Saturn is the greater inauspiciousness and Mars the lesser. Jupiter and Venus are always auspicious: Jupiter is the greater auspiciousness and Venus the lesser."

O Jupiter, O favourable star,
 O you who remain faithful in all of your promises.
 O you in whose glance lies the soul's enlivening,
 under your rule the world can be conquered.
 O you who write the letter of succour,
 you are the guardian of triumph and victory.
 O you, upon whom the world's existence rests,
 and who is disposed to the best interest of the course of the world,
 The elevation of my fortune depends on you,
 the heart receives its whole strength from you.
 Cast a glance on me by way of fidelity;
 solve [my problem] if you have any solution.
 Avert my declining fortune (*idbār*) from me;
 lead in that which befits chivalrous men.
 Bring a token from the friend to me,
 one rose, lost from rose garden.

(ll. 68-75)

Like Abraham, when Majnūn realises that Venus and Jupiter are unable to change his ill fate, he turns his face to God in a long prayer, asking him to change his destiny. Just as God tested Abraham's faith by presenting the stars to him as deities, Nizāmī presents Majnūn with the same test and, through this story, condemns the worship of any other deity than God. In this way, Majnūn is presented as a firm believer, who relies only on God. Nizāmī's idea conforms to that of Muḥammad Ghazālī who, in his *Mishkāt al-anwār*, on the basis of a prophetic tradition condemns those who study the stars for any purpose other than those prescribed in the Koran.⁴⁹ After his prayer, Majnūn falls asleep and 'his fortune' (*bakht*) makes him dream of a "tree growing from the earth to heaven."

A bird flew from the tip of a branch
 and approached him with a bold nature
 Sprinkling pearls from its bill
 upon the top of Majnūn's crown.

(ll. 95-6)

The dream heralds the termination of Majnūn's ill-fortune and the beginning of a life filled with hope and happy tidings. When morning dawns, Majnūn awakes as spirited as the bird in his dream. In the following chapter, which describes the events of the day following

⁴⁹ The tradition runs as follows: "God has seventy thousand veils made of light and darkness; if he lifts up these veils, the mightiness of His Essence will burn the eyes of the seer."

Majnūn's dream, the happy lover receives a letter from his forlorn beloved:

Fortune, by which issues can be put on right course,
 woke up that day from its right side.
 Fortune (*daulat*) became weary of rebukes;
 fortune (*bakht*) arrived, although it came late.
 (Ch. 46: ll. 3-4)

The bird of Majnūn's dream becomes reality in the form of an enlightened old man (*pīr-i nūrānī*) who surprises Majnūn with Laylī's letter. Such an old and enlightened man as a guide and helper of people appeared in classical Persian literature as early as Sanā'ī's *Sayr al-'ibād ilā 'l-ma'ād* (*The Journey of the Servants to the Place of Return*).⁵⁰ He appears frequently in the works of the Illuminationist philosopher, Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, especially in the *'Aql-i surkh* (*The Purple Archangel*). Here, this venerated old man represents the Active Intelligence, an intermediary between Universal Reason and the human intellect.⁵¹ Although Nizāmī does not explicitly indicate that this old man can be taken as a representation of the Active Intelligence, he does compare him to the prophet *Khidr*, a character who is often taken as Active Intelligence in mystico-allegorical narratives. If we wish to apply this model, Laylī, the old man and Majnūn would represent the Universal Soul, the Active Intelligence, and the human intellect, respectively.

The enlightened old man unites the lovers by arranging a meeting. Before delivering Laylī's letter to Majnūn, the old man addresses Majnūn, alluding to his change of fortune: "O you whose wild horse of fortune has become tamed (. . .)."⁵²

In chapter 47:52-5, Laylī urges Majnūn in her letter to divert his attention from the transitory world:

For your own sake, be happy with yourself
 as you are in this plane.
 Do not frown because of the revolution of the world,
 for this Wheel of time revolves all the time.
 Do not look at the farmer, who sows the seeds,
 look rather at the seeds, which bear seeds again.
 The date-tree that bears thorns today
 will yield fresh dates as its fruit tomorrow.

⁵⁰ See De Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, p. 90.

⁵¹ H. Corbin in *ELr*, under 'Aql-e Surkh.

⁵² The word *rām*, 'tamed' also refers to the zodiacal sign, Aries.

Majnūn's good fortune lasts until Laylī's death. When Laylī dies, in chapter 62:51–3, Majnūn alludes to the tree of his dream and condemns the tyranny of destiny:

A blossom sprouted from my tree,
 woe to me because my fortune (*bakht*) did not last.
 I had a handful of fair violets,
 pure they were, when they grew from my heart.
 A tyrant robbed me of them;
 I had sown them [but] he reaped them.

8. *Majnūn's bakht and daulat*

Bakht and *daulat* are two of the central concepts employed by Nizāmī to signify Majnūn's ill-fate. The word *bakht*, 'fortune' occurs quite frequently in the poem. Fortune holds sway over the actions and decisions of all the characters, including the narrator. Etymologically, it is derived from the Middle Persian (*Pahlawī*) *bakhtan* (New Pers. *bakhshīdan*, 'to apportion,' 'to allot'), from which we have *bakhsh*, a share or allocation. Thus its meaning was the same as the Arabic, and Koranic word *naṣīb*. The difference between them is that *naṣīb* refers mainly to what is allocated by God, whereas *bakht* is used in New Persian in the sense of good and bad fortune. Its meaning depends on the context, as well as on the pre- and post-modifying adjectives.⁵³ Nizāmī's use of *bakht* is in line with his predecessors, such as Firdausī and Gurgānī, in whose epics *bakht* holds sway over everything.⁵⁴ In *Laylī and Majnūn*, *bakht* underscores other synonymous words for destiny. It appears both as an abstract concept and as a personified figure: sometimes Fortune the Watcher falls asleep, at times it dies and then comes to life again. At the beginning of the story, Majnūn's father strongly desires that the 'hand of fortune' (*dast-i bakht*) may bestow a son on him; he strongly believes in the all-vanquishing power of *bakht*. In chapter 31:85–6, Majnūn says to himself:

Today, the day has stretched its hand
 while fortune, which was asleep, has died.

⁵³ For the use of *bakht* in *Pahlawī* texts see L.H. Gray, in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, under Fortune.

⁵⁴ See H. Ringgren, *Fatalism*, p. 21.

There must be fidelity in the fortune of
one like me who has sound reason.

Bakht brings misery and happiness, honour and contempt, grief and pleasure. Nothing can escape from its hand. It is depicted as a hunter who, at a distance, shoots fatal arrows, and when he is near, cuts off the bond of union between lovers. Man may end in ruin if he is not satisfied with his own allotted portion. When man craves for more things than God has actually apportioned, *bakht* will turn its back on him and will play with him like a cat with a mouse. When *bakht* is used in a positive sense, the poet says that *bakht* turns its face to man or that it smiles upon him. When used in a negative sense, *bakht* turns its back; it frowns and eagerly throws its lasso to catch man. *Bakht* often seeks a pretext to punish people. Majnūn is aware of his misfortune and strongly believes in his predetermined fate. In various modes of expressions, he frequently complains of his 'bad-fortune' (*bakht-i bad*), and weeps for his luckless condition. In chapter 22:18, Majnūn compares *bakht* to a ruthless hunter chasing him constantly: "My ill-fortune is looking after me/how can one wash ill-fortune from oneself?" Again in chapter 40:14, when Majnūn answers his father's plea to come home, he refers to his ill-luck: "My fortune (*bakht*) has entrusted me to the wind in such a way/that whatever I have heard, is all memories."

Majnūn himself is also compared to the fluctuating modes of fortune. When Majnūn's father comes to see him in his ruined place in chapter 20:58, he finds him with "The blood of his liver streaming from his eyes/falling and rising like his fortune (*bakht*)."

His wandering in the desert in chapter 27:6 are compared to his *bakht*, too: "In accordance with his own fortune (*bakht*), the fugitive Majnūn roamed the desert in a bewildering manner."

Moreover, in chapter 47:20, Laylī emphasises Majnūn's ill-fate by comparing her separation from Majnūn with the latter's ill-fortune: "In accordance with your fortune (*bakht*), I am separated from you/although I am alone, I am your mate." In chapter 48:114, in his letter to Laylī, Majnūn refers to his own declining fortune: "If my declining fortune (*idbār*) becomes invisible/may your ascending fortune (*iqbāl*) be everlasting."⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Other references to Majnūn's *bakht* can be found in chapters 14:41 and 19:4 respectively: "Had fortune (*bakht*) removed its interests from Majnūn's heart/he

Majnūn's ill-fate is also described using compound words relating to salt in three places. His *bakht* is characterised as being saltish (*shūr*), or black (*sīyāh*), both pointing to intense misfortune. In chapter 23:21, when 'Āmirī takes his son home for the first time, the narrator characterises Majnūn as *shūr-bakht*: "Due to his salty fortune (*shūr-bakhtī*) that enamoured heart/arduously tried to be patient." In chapter 42:70, which describes the death of Majnūn's father, the narrator again refers to Majnūn's salty fortune: "He let out a breath because of his salty fortune (*shūr-bakhtī*)/he lived through a hundred thousand toils." After the death of Laylī in chapter 62:24, Majnūn laments to himself and asks rhetorical questions, addressing Laylī as *bī-namak*, the saltless one: "O saltless one, what kind of salty fortune is this?/why are you so hard on this feeble person?"

Bakht often stands in sharp contrast to *daulat*, a good turn of fortune. Whereas *daulat* is always positive, *bakht* appears both in a negative and positive sense. In chapter 16 of *Makhzan al-asrār*, Nizāmī sets out his concept of *daulat*:

The course of action depends on *daulat*, and not on our deliberation
as long as the world exists, *daulat* offers sustenance.
Man will fall on the ground because of the lack of *daulat*,
why should the owners of *daulat* be afraid of the world?
They will offer you power by *daulat* and not because of illusion;
No one receives *daulat* as a play-thing.
Circle around the head of the fortunate ones (*daulatiyān*)
so that you may be freed from revolution.
Happiness comes forth from the star Gemini (*jauza*)
so smash the walnut (*jauz*) and try your fortune (*bakht*).⁵⁶
Be humble when you are knocking at the door of *daulat*,
divest yourself of the knot of worldly concerns.

Daulat is always awake and vigilant whereas *bakht* can fall asleep and go on a journey.⁵⁷ In chapter 31:99, when the chieftain Naufal realises

would never return again to his native dwelling." "Fortune (*bakht*) has removed its interest from his heart/his father was entrapped by Majnūn's problem."

⁵⁶ W. Dastgirdī observes that whoever is born under the influence of Gemini is graced with *daulat*, reason, and fortune. It was the custom of the ancient Iranian kings to foretell the fortune of their children by breaking walnuts. See *Makhzan al-asrār*, pp. 154–5.

⁵⁷ In one of his *ghazals* with the *matlaʿ*, *māh-am āmad ba dar-i khāna-u dar khāna nabūdam/khāna gūʾī ba saram rīkht chū īn qīssa shunūdam* ('My Moon arrived at my house, but I was not at home/it was as if the house crashed upon my head when I heard this tale'), the twentieth-century poet, Shahriyār, illustrates the contrast

that he cannot unite Majnūn with Laylī, he suggests to Majnūn that he might marry some other maiden: "So that you can achieve your goal through such a maiden/and that fortune (*daulat*) may return to your door." Apparently Naufal believes that by choosing another maiden, whose star is in harmony with Majnūn's star, the poor lover can be sure that his *daulat* may return to him. Majnūn's father advises his son in chapter 20:28–31 to associate with those who are fortunate so that his *daulat* come back to him:

Associate with those who are fortunate (*daulatīyān*);
escape from this fugitive fortune (*bakht-i gurīz-pā*).
Let fortune never slip away from the hand, because
where fortune exists, there exists heart's gratification too.
Fortune is the source of solutions to problems;
it is the turquoise seal of lordship.
The victory through which the world was conquered
was due to good fortune.

9. Majnūn's fate based on gnostic principles

As with many other Persian poets, Nizāmī's view of the world is profoundly influenced by gnosticism. He leans heavily on the gnostic idea of fate, which separates the godhead from the material world. In the gnostic system, it is accepted that the soul ascends to its native abode. In each of his epics, Nizāmī dwells on the theme of the soul's ascent when he portrays the Prophet's nocturnal Ascension (*mi'rāj*).⁵⁸

between *daulat* and *bakht* in a single distich: "That vigilant fortune (*daulat*) arrived while fortune (*bakht*) put me in a deep sleep/I, who had not slept a single night of my life because of my nightly visions of her." See Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shahriyār, *Diwān*, Tehran: Qiyām, fifteenth edition, 1377, Vol. 1, p. 293.

⁵⁸ For the Ascension theme in prayer and as an object of mystical meditation, see A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 218–21. For an analysis of *mi'rāj* in Nizāmī's work see C.H. de Fouchécour, "Les Récits d'ascension (Me'rāj) dans l'œuvre de Nizāmī" in *Études irano-aryennes offertes à Gilbert Lazard*, ed. C.H. de Fouchécour, & P. Gignoux, Paris, 1989, pp. 99–108; for further literature on the *mi'rāj* see B. Schrieke and J. Horovitz in the *EI*, under *Mi'rādj*. Strangely enough, the rich *mi'rāj* literature in Persian language is not treated in this entry, except that B.W. Robinson makes a short reference to the importance of this theme among Iranian peoples in the sub-entry on "The *Mi'rādj* in the Islamic Art." Persian speaking poets dwelled extensively on this theme for various purposes. Compare G. Böwering in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, under *Mi'rāj*. See also M.A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'ān, Mi'rāj, Poetic and Theological Writings*, New York: Paulist Press, 1996, pp. 47–56 and chapter 7 on Bisṭāmī.

He encourages man to follow the Prophet's ascent, and to divest himself of all things material and free himself from the bondage of the formal world.⁵⁹

Nizāmī depicts the Prophet's nocturnal journey with dazzling beauty, as an ideal representation of man's spiritual elevation and moral perfection. The Prophet travelled through the spheres, encountering all the prophets on his way. He finally arrived at the Divine Presence, leaving the angel Gabriel and his wondrous steed (*Būrāq*) behind.⁶⁰ Then he journeyed beyond dimensions and time, leaving everything behind. He ascended so high that even Gabriel, who conducted the Prophet through the spheres to the Empyrean, said: "If I had set one step further, my wings would have been burned."

The ascension can be taken symbolically as liberation from the dictates of this corruptible and material world, and attaining to loving union with the immaterial Beloved. Freeing oneself from the world is a prerequisite to gaining release from the dictates of fate. In some of his works, the poet devotes special chapters to "the Reproach to the World," as in *Khusrāu and Shīrīn*, in others he incorporates his severe censure of the world in the story itself. In *Laylī and Majnūn*, after the death of characters such as Ibn Salām, Majnūn's father and mother, Laylī and Majnūn, the narrator finds an opportunity to describe the malignant aspects of this world. Here the world is likened to a dark and deep abyss, an ugly crone or a stinking whore who has made herself up to seduce man, a demon with an angelic appearance seeking man's soul (41:26; 61:90), the house of sorrow (41:22), the province of demons, and the passage of deluge (41:29). The world has a sweet mouth like a date, but its kisses are date-thorns (41:30). It is 'an ancient decaying caravanserai,' an unstable bridge on which nothing can be built; it is a sandpit (*khākdān*). The world is often blamed for its transitoriness and the vicissitudes it brings to mankind. In *Makhzan al-asrār*, Nizāmī remarks that "the world is not worth a (grain of) barley because it is transient."⁶¹ Day

⁵⁹ For Nizāmī's view on the world see M. Tharwat, *Ganjīna-yi hikmat*, pp. 101–13.

⁶⁰ See R. Paret in *EI*, under *Burāk*.

⁶¹ In *Sharaf-nāma*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 89, ll. 3–7, Nizāmī gives a forthright definition of 'world' (*jahān*): "What is the world? abstain from its incantation/obtain deliverance from its claws//The world is a tree with six branches [lit. 'sides'] and four roots/it has nailed many a body to four pins//Our leaves will fall one by one from this tree/when a hard wind blows//You will find none will settle in this gar-

and night are compared by Nizāmī to two audacious mice (*mūsh-i gustākh*), or to two black and white birds or moths, which are making a hole in the bag of man's life. Nizāmī uses a number of Prophetic Traditions such as "the world is the seedbed for the hereafter"; 'the world is the prison of the pious believer' and particularly 'die before you die' to remind the reader of the world's fleeting nature.⁶²

10. *A web of fates*

In so far as Majnūn is the victim of fate, Nizāmī is consciously following the footprints of his precursors such as Firdausī and Gurgānī, who in turn revived the ancient Iranian concept of fate in their epics. Nizāmī's fatalistic treatment of destiny perfectly fits the dramatic aspect of Majnūn's legend. By emphasising this aspect of Majnūn's character and by maintaining a fatalistic ideology throughout most of the poem, Nizāmī presents a vivid picture of the lover who is trapped in the unfortunate web of fate. This belief in a predestined fate is not confined to Majnūn alone: the narrator and all other characters in the poem also submit themselves to the decrees of destiny and strongly believe in the supernatural heavenly powers.

However, beyond fatalism there is also philosophy. Nizāmī shows that man should be content with his own allotted portion of destiny, which the Apportioner has engraved in the Well-Preserved Tablet at the dawn of creation. Any desire to alter one's predetermined fate may turn into a catastrophe because God, who acts in the best interest of his creation, has allocated man's portion on the basis of the capacity of each individual. The only way of dealing with inexorable destiny is to realise one's own shortcomings, and have a firm belief in God. Majnūn is aware of his ill-fate, and although at times he poses philosophical questions concerning fate, he submits entirely to his own share of destiny. Moreover, Majnūn's supplication to the stars shows the futility of relying on stars to changing the course of destiny. Here Majnūn demonstrates that the stars are also God's creatures and they act according to God's will; man

den/everyone will cast his glance on it for a breath//Every instant, a new fruit appears on it/one withers away, while another waxes."

⁶² See, for instance, *Khusrau u Shirin*, ed. B. Tharwatyān, 99:40: "It could be better to learn this advice/that we die once before we have died."

should implore God instead of the heavenly bodies. In *Laylī and Majnūn*, Nizāmī rejects the idea that the celestial bodies, as agents of God, exert a direct influence on the sublunary events, without eliminating entirely the popular idea of the role of the stars and planets. In addition, by employing the Koranic story of Abraham's communion with the stars, Nizāmī alludes to the spiritual degrees of light as these have been explained by Muḥammad Ghazālī. Combined with a negative view of the world, this closely resembles a gnostic philosophy. For those fallen into the world of fate, the only way to rise to the original home is by way of Gnostic intuition.

CHAPTER TEN

“PEARLS SCATTERED FROM THE LIPS”

1. *Majnūn's poetic genius*

One of the principal attributes of Majnūn that caused him to become a legendary character is his poetic genius. This trait is underscored in early Arabic sources such as the *Kitāb ash-shiʿr*, in which Ibn Qutayba focuses primarily on Majnūn's poetry.¹ Here, Majnūn plainly declares himself a poet and even competes with other famous bards such as Qays b. Dhariḥ, the lover of Lubnā.

In line with the Arabic sources, Nizāmī presents Majnūn as an able poet who dazzles the reader with his wit and poetic gift. In fact, due to the beauty of his poems, scholars such as J.E. Bertel's have remarked that whenever Majnūn speaks, the text becomes complicated and is lavishly adorned with rhetorical figures.² It would be hard to show that the poem is more rhetorically dense when Majnūn is speaking, especially since Nizāmī is a word magician and a master in using figures of speech: even the lines he gives to a shadowy character possess poetic significance. It may be that Bertel's has been led to his conclusion simply because, with 54 speeches, Majnūn is the second most loquacious character, after the narrator who delivers 164 speeches.

Bertel's connects Majnūn's poetic ability to the effects of love: “If in *Khusrau and Shirin*, love inspires the characters to perform heroic deeds, here Nizāmī displays passion transformed into exquisite poetry.”³ In contrast to Bertel's positive evaluation of Majnūn's poetry, J. Scott Meisami characterises Majnūn's poetry as “a perverted art precisely because it is limited to self-expression and knows no higher purpose; like the desert in which it is produced, it is sterile.”⁴ Some lines

¹ ‘Abdullāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb ash-shiʿr*, Vol. 2, p. 565. For a treatment of the legend of Majnūn in al-Wālibī's *Dīwān* and other Arabic sources, see A.E. Khairallah, *Love, Madness and Poetry*, chapters 2 and 3.

² J.E. Bertel's, *Izbrannye Trudy*, p. 273.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

⁴ J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 165; also see *idem*, “Kings and

further on, she adds: (...) "Majnūn's madness causes his poetry to provide, not guidance toward conduct (the proper function of poetry), but misguidance—it is, in short, a negative exemplum."⁵ If we are to assess such judgements, we will first have to analyse some specimens of Majnūn's poetry.

Poetry is the main vehicle used by Majnūn to express himself and to convince people of his sincere love. Strictly speaking, the form of Majnūn's poetry is the same *mathnawī* as the narrative text. Nizāmī does not insert the *ghazal* in its conventional form in his romance, as in other Persian 'Udhrite romances such as 'Ayyūqī's *Warqa and Gulshāh*.⁶ Still Nizāmī produces sheer lyricism in the *mathnawī* form; the poet is demonstrating the possibilities of this poetic form for various genres. In a study of the occurrence of the *ghazal* in romances, Robert Dankoff argues that where poets such as Nizāmī have not inserted *ghazal* into their romances, their text "has the same austere and unrelieved quality that we find in the epic and religious *mathnawīs*."⁷ And at the end of his article, Dankoff concludes:

Why Nizāmī chose to do without them (i.e. *ghazals*), even in his *Laylī u Majnūn*, is a question that has not yet been addressed, so far as I know, by literary scholars of Persian, and I shall but suggest an answer here. Fakhruddīn Gurgānī, before Nizāmī, had also avoided them in his *Vis u Rāmīn* (ca. 1050) although Rāmīn, like Varqa, is a minstrel who composes poems to his beloved. That Gurgānī and 'Ayyūqī followed different paths might be due to their different sources, the one drawing from pre-Islamic Persian romance, the other from Arabic stories of love-poets. If 'Ayyūqī and Gurgānī were the two possible models for Nizāmī, it is easy to see why he chose Gurgānī, the superior poet by far.⁸

Dankoff's arguments are not entirely accurate: concerning his first point, that the text remains "austere and unrelieved" without the

Lovers: Ethical Dimensions of Medieval Persian Romance" in *Edebiyāt*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1987, p. 19.

⁵ Ibid., p. 165.

⁶ Apart from 'Ayyūqī's romance, the *ghazal* occurs in the genre of *dah-nāma* such as 'Irāqī's *Ushshāq-nāma*, or Auḥadī of Marāgha's *Manṭiq al-'ushshāq*. In Auḥadī's poem even single lines are added. For the genre of *dah-nāma* see T. Gandjei, "The Genesis and Definition of a Literary Composition: the Dah-nāma ("Ten love-letters")" in *Der Islam*, 47, 1971, pp. 59–66.

⁷ R. Dankoff, "The Use of Ghazal in Persian and Turkish Masnavīs" in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 43, 1984, p. 9.

⁸ Ibid., p. 22.

inclusion of the *ghazal*, it will become evident here that Nizāmī produces lyrics of highest quality without risking the harmony of the text by inserting the rigid form of the *ghazal*. As we shall see in several examples in a moment, the quality of the lyrics speaks for itself. In fact, H. Jāwīd singles out many couplets from Nizāmī's poem which have influenced the lyric style of Ḥāfiz, Persia's grand lyricist.⁹ With regard to Dankoff's suggestion that Nizāmī preferred Gurgānī over 'Ayyūqī, it must be said that Nizāmī imitates Gurgānī in his previous poem, *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, for which the subject-matter, as in Gurgānī's poem, is drawn from pre-Islamic Persia.¹⁰ What is more, in *Laylī and Majnūn*, we see traces of 'Ayyūqī: the lovers meeting at school, the female beloved's resistance to an imposed husband, the occurrence of wars, etc., may have been taken from 'Ayyūqī. Nizāmī does not choose one, ignoring the other: as an excellent story-teller, he uses all the material at his disposal to recount his story in a charming way.

There are at least thirty explicit references to Majnūn as a poet, composing various types of poetry.¹¹ The first appears in chapter 14:33, where the narrator reports that Majnūn, who is only ten years of age, "sang splendid hymns (*surūd*) and chanted woefully like lovers." His poetry revolves primarily around love and Laylī: "On whatever theme Majnūn told a story, he did not deviate from the tale of Laylī."¹² Majnūn interweaves the topic of love with the themes of abstinence and preparation for the afterlife, especially in passages in which he mourns someone's death. The author, the narrator and the characters of the poem speak more about man's transient nature in the world than love itself. Abstinence has been treated by mystics as a concrete way of preparing oneself for the station of 'annihilation' (*fanā*) in the immaterial Beloved.

⁹ H. Jāwīd, *Ḥāfiz-i Jāwīd*, pp. 253-57.

¹⁰ Nizāmī not only followed Gurgānī in his choice of the metre, he also imitated his insertion of the letters the lovers exchange, and his description of night.

¹¹ The following types of poetry are mentioned: love lyrics (*ghazals*), odes (*qaṣīdas*), tales (*qiṣṣas*), anecdotes (*hikāyas*), hymns (*surūds*), love songs (*nashīd-i mihrabānī*), erotic introductions to odes (*nasībs*), fragmentary poetry (*qif'as*), and couplets (*bayts*).

¹² Chapter 27:39.

2. *Poetry as a mirror of Majnūn's psychological states*

It would be redundant to cite all the passages in which Majnūn exposes something of his poetic genius. In what follows, a number of Majnūn's monologues will be considered. The role of the narrator in this form of speech will also be treated here, because the reader's response depends largely on the way the narrator presents the monologues. Most of Majnūn's monologues are framed by preceding and following comments by the narrator which are as important as the monologue itself. They regulate the tone of the monologue so that Majnūn is subordinated to the narrator. Empathic adjectives such as "destitute," or "lonely," and images such as "burning like a candle," "the floating earth" and "broken-winged bird," which are repeated throughout the poem, shape the reader's opinion of Majnūn.

In the monologues, the narrator reveals the depth and complexity of Majnūn's psyche. Majnūn is depicted as a connoisseur of poetry, as a thinking character who is aware of his surroundings. Since he often focuses his attention on ontological questions, it seems that Majnūn is the only thinking character in the poem, apart from the narrator. What is more, Majnūn's philosophy corresponds entirely to that of the narrator. This is important when interpreting Majnūn's character. The narrator never criticises him and always shows sympathy with him.

Generally speaking, the monologues purport to present a real psychological process, revealing the character's level of intelligence, philosophical stance and social class.¹³ In his monologues, Majnūn reveals his most intimate thoughts and feelings, and his intentions. By exposing his deepest emotions and his selfless love for Laylī to the audience, and justifying his behaviour, he gradually wins the reader's sympathy. Sometimes, he seems to beg the reader for help by presenting himself as a lonely, frail framed and ill-starred person who is unable to find a solution for his problem. His tears are another perceptible symptom to convince the reader of the injustice done to him. His speech is so emotionally powerful and moving that the reader may well weep for his wretched condition.

Majnūn's monologues have several advantages in terms of influencing the reader. They share the directive feature of communicative lan-

¹³ See Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, p. 88.

guage. In addition to figures of speech, Majnūn uses many proverbs, wise sayings and comparisons to depict his state of mind. The reader is actually placed in a particular corner, from which he is compelled to see a limited number of topics, such as love, life's transience and death, repeated throughout the poem. In the monologues, the reader expects to find answers to questions that are not properly answered in other parts of the poem.

The reader is often made aware of the fact that a shift is taking place from one form of speech to another; the shift is heralded either by the title of a new chapter, or by a brief note from the narrator, who interprets and vindicates the coming monologue.¹⁴ It should be added here that Niẓāmī uses the literary resources of the classical Persian tradition as a medium to present monologues. Various genres of poetry are borrowed, each fitting Majnūn's psychological state at a certain time and the situations in which he finds himself. His monologues include the genre of 'prayers' (*munājāt*) when he speaks to God (ch. 45); 'complaints' (*shakwā'iyya*) when he speaks to the wind, a crow and the stars (chapters 15, 34, 45 respectively); 'elegy' (*marthiya*) when he cries for the death of a loved one; the 'state of one's condition' (*ḥasb-i ḥāl*) when he speaks to himself (ch. 18). Sometimes these genres are synthesised in one passage. The motifs and metaphors used in Majnūn's poetry are drawn mainly from the genres of 'love-lyrics' (*ghazaliyyāt*), the antinomian motifs in love poetry usually denoted by the term *qalandariyyāt*,¹⁵ 'bacchanalia' (*khamriyyāt*), and 'asceticism' (*zuhdiyyāt*).

Majnūn's first monologue occurs in chapter 18 and extends over 63 couplets. The narrator introduces the speech and sums up Majnūn's poor physical and mental state. He paints a grim picture of the destitute lover. He expresses Majnūn's thought, mood, shocking state,

¹⁴ As D. Cohn has noted, the monologues "generally contain flurries of unanswered questions, exclamations, invocations, invectives or curses addressed to various absent persons, human and divine." Cohn's characterisation of this type of speech fits the monologues in Niẓāmī's poem. However it should be remembered that Niẓāmī's text, like most medieval narratives, was written for a primarily oral culture. The whole text, whether monologue, dialogue, or narrative, is meant to be read to an audience. It cannot be compared to a modern novel which may detail all kinds of psychological subtleties, inner conflicts and the desires of characters. See D. Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, p. 99. For a discussion of the difference between a medieval romance and modern novel, see J. Stevens, *Medieval Romance*, p. 175.

¹⁵ For a useful treatment of the antinomian motifs see J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, pp. 74-5; also see D. Šabūr, *Āfāq-i ghazal*, pp. 202-16.

nervous breakdown and feelings with words and images such as “senseless,” “intoxicated,” “tearful,” “dressed in rags,” “abandoned,” etc. Majnūn’s loneliness, his throwing dust on his head as a sign of having lost a loved one, his feeling of being a stranger amongst his own people and the way people cry for him are highlighted. These descriptions require emotional reactions from the reader, especially when Majnūn’s speech supports the narrator’s words.

The narrator introduces one monologue as follows:

Like clay, Majnūn was slapped abjectly upon a stone,
and another stone was put upon his heart.¹⁶

His pure body was ground between two stones,
become like the lees.¹⁷

(chapter 18, ll. 17–8)

These lines prepare the reader for Majnūn’s lengthy complaint, of which only the relevant couplets will be quoted:

Majnūn sat down and mournfully cried:

“O what shall I do? What is my cure? (. . .)

The flask of good name and the glass of honour

fell on a stone and are broken. (. . .)

I am the crippled prey of the beloved,

I am the target of her arrows.

I ask the beloved, whom I obey like my heart,
to kill me for her own sake.

Should my beloved call me drunk, I am drunk
and should she say I am mad, I am that too. (. . .)

I wish the wind, which entrusted me to destruction,
would blow on me,

Or that mighty lightning might strike
and set both my house and life on fire. (. . .)

My kinsmen despise me because of my nature;
friends are ashamed of my name. (. . .)

O companions of the feast and the bowstring,
I bid you all farewell, farewell, (. . .)

You stole my heart and soul, what kind of a treachery is this?
this is no game, it is a tyrannous hand. (. . .)

Although my hand cannot grasp union with you,
I do not despair, since I subsist on hope.”

¹⁶ To put a stone on one’s heart means to be sorrowful. The reference seems to be to grinding dry clay in a mill.

¹⁷ Here Nizāmī is using mill imagery. For a treatment of mill imagery in Persian poetry see my article “The Spinning of the Mill Lightens My Soul” in *Persica*, 2001, No. 17, Leuven: Peeters, pp. 107–26.

A thirsty infant sees many times in his dream
 that he is given water from a golden bowl.
 But when he awakes from sweet sleep
 he is sucking his finger for thirst. (. . .)
 Your love cannot be removed from my heart;
 this secret cannot be revealed to anybody.
 This secret has permeated my body with the milk
 and will depart from my body with my soul.
 (ll. 22, 25, 29-31, 35-6, 40, 42, 84-5)

The narrator rounds off Majnūn's complaint by depicting the sympathetic reaction of people who are watching Majnūn, so arousing the reader's compassion:

He said this and fell to the ground;
 those who were watching became sorrowful.
 Out of compassion they wished to find a solution for him,
 and took him to his home again.
 (ll. 86-7)

What is interesting in these last two couplets is that we discover that there are actually other listeners present, in addition to Zephyr. At the beginning of the speech, there is no listener, their unmarked arrival makes it seem that people have gathered around Majnūn when they heard his sad complaint. Their presence and response accentuate Majnūn's miserable state and influence the reader's judgement.

In his lyric passage, which has the quality but not the form of a *ghazal*, Majnūn uses various metaphors borrowed from love poetry to depict his own condition. He is acutely aware that both Laylī and himself are the target of popular blame (*malāma*). In a mystical context, such blame is positive and shows the high station the lover can achieve on the path of love. The blame should go so far that even friends and relatives must become strangers and blame the lover. Many *malāmafi* mystics deliberately provoked people by their actions in order to be blamed. Majnūn is like a *qalandar*-mystic who violates social norms and concentrates on one goal: worshipping the Beloved. What is more, Majnūn shows his utter servitude to Laylī using hunting metaphors. He depicts himself as Laylī's "crippled prey," who is still the target of her arrows. Then he reveals his desire to be slain by the hand of the beloved. In contrast, blame in the mundane sense of the word is ruinous for Laylī and her tribe. Majnūn does not take Laylī's position into consideration, and continues to idealise her in public. Laylī, however, accepts Majnūn's behaviour and never turns against him: it is her father who intervenes. In her

messages to Majnūn, she encourages him to compose erotic poems for her.

Another monologue from Majnūn complaining to Zephyr (*bād-i sabā*) appears in chapter fifteen. The address to the wind is a popular *topos* in Persian lyrical and didactic poetry. For instance, in the *Sayr al-‘ibād*, Sanā’ī wraps up his whole narrative in the form of a message delivered by the wind.¹⁸ This is an ingenious literary device used by many poets to cast their didactic message in indirect reported speech. In Nizāmī’s *Laylī and Majnūn*, the Zephyr is not merely an implied listener; it is a messenger to whom Majnūn confides his intimate feelings and personal thoughts. The Zephyr brings Laylī’s scent to Majnūn and takes Majnūn’s messages to her. By speaking to the wind, and indirectly to the reader, Majnūn becomes more credible, because such a love message is confidential and the reader is curious to hear it. The passage is prefaced by the narrator’s description of Majnūn’s loneliness, his fervent and chaste love, his broken heart and his torrent of tears. The passage is a lyric containing elements from the genre of *shakwā’iyya* (‘complaint’) and *ḥasb-i ḥāl*. The significance of this excerpt is that Majnūn explains why and how he has fallen in love. This passage is of great importance as far as the transformation of Majnūn’s character is concerned. He is still in the early stages of loverhood and this is the first place in the poem in which he gives vent to his feelings in a long and cohesive fashion. He begs the Zephyr:

O Zephyr, rise at the morning glow
and attach yourself to the tip of Laylī’s curl.
Say to her that the one who was robbed by the wind,
is your fallen one (*uflāda*) in the dust of your road,
He is imploring your breath from Zephyr;
he is telling his anguish to the earth’s dust.
Send a breeze from your land,
give him a handful of dust as a memory.
Everyone, who does not blow like a breeze towards you,
is not worth the wind, let alone the dust.
And he, who does not submit his life to you,
it would be better for him to die of grief.
Had the fire of your love not existed,
the storm of sorrow for you would have stolen my life.

¹⁸ See J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, p. 90. For the poetic use of *al-sabā* and its difference from the Zephyr see J. Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd*, pp. 123–34.

O loved one, were you not the tears of my eyes
 the fire of your sorrow would have burned my heart.
 The sun, which shines on the [whole] world,
 will be scourged by my firing sigh.
 O hidden candle of the chamber of my soul,
 do not afflict your very own moth.
 Your enchanting eyes made me dream
 that my liver was being roasted so much.
 O, your grief and sorrow are the comfort of the heart;
 they are both the cure and the wound of the heart.
 Your lips are sugar, so if you may,
 give a portion to me.
 Being thus distracted in such a bond [of love]
 that sugar is the consoling confection.
 O moon, I have fallen from your eyes
 because I was suddenly struck by an evil eye.
 I, who am afflicted by an evil eye,
 have lost a ripe love like yourself.
 Many fresh and ripe fruits
 have fallen on the ground because of an evil eye.
 The hinting fingers of the world have slain hundreds of people,
 for, indeed, the wound of an evil finger is a killing one.
 That indigo-coloured line, which is painted around the face,
 is to repel the evil eye of the rival.

(ll. 19-37)

In this *ghazal*, Majnūn refers to some important aspects of his loving state. Not only is he utterly obedient to Laylī himself, he suggests in couplet 24 that others, who do not proffer their lives to Laylī, would do better to die from sorrow. By idealising Laylī as an immaculate being, Majnūn universalises his beloved; she does not belong only to Majnūn, but to the whole world. Through this kind of idealisation, which is usually expressed in religious terminology, Majnūn shows his sincere humility to his lady and, at a symbolic level, he invites people to worship and love his beloved. Laylī is literally everything for Majnūn: she is both malady and remedy. The fire of her love evaporates the storm of Laylī's sorrow which would otherwise have cost Majnūn his life. Majnūn compares Laylī with his own tears. The personified tears extinguish the burning fire of Majnūn's heart. Hyperbolically, Majnūn claims that his sighs could even burn the glowing sun. What is more, Majnūn gives a reason for his present state. He blames Laylī's 'enchanting eyes' (*chashm-i jādū*), which have cast a spell on him and have caused him to sleep. In other words, Majnūn is in a kind of ecstatic state, concentrating his attention only

on Laylī. Majnūn feels he is a victim of both an evil eye and a hinting finger.¹⁹

Another monologue from Majnūn appears in chapter 34, in which he addresses a black crow and asks it to take a message to his beloved. Once again the narrator prefaces Majnūn's monologue with a description of the extremity of his condition. Majnūn is reported to be very thirsty, walking in the desert at noon with the blistering sun shining relentlessly on him. The desperate lover is looking for shade and water when he finds an oasis arrayed with graceful trees and a shining lawn "like green silk." After satisfying his thirst and lying down under a tree, he sees a crow perching on the branches. Majnūn compares his own wretched condition to the blackness of the bird and takes the crow's black hue as a sign of mourning:

He said: "O black one whose book [i.e. record of one's deeds] is blank,
on whose account are you clothed in black?
O night-glowing one, why are you dressed in the night's colour?
why is your day turned as black as today? (. . .)
On the day when you go to my beloved
say to her that I am done without her.
Do comprehend, for, if you cannot understand,
I will become annihilated in my ruined condition.
You said: 'Be not afraid, I will assist you,'
but I fear I will die because of this passion. (. . .)
When a wolf steals a lamb from the side of her mother,
of what use is the cry of the shepherd!
When the storm destroys the foundation,
[what difference does it make] whether the wall is of clay and straw
or of steel.
When the sown field remains dry without any yield,
[what difference does it make] whether the clouds shed rain or pass over?"
(ll. 18-9, 25-7, 29-31)

The interesting point in this passage is that the crow is not treated only as an ominous bird, which is usually the case in Arabic ornithomancy and literature, but also has positive attributes.²⁰ The

¹⁹ For the notion of evil eye in Persian love poetry see my article: "Magic in Classical Persian Amatory Literature" in *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1, Winter 1999, pp. 83-6. In *Iqbāl-nāma* (ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 60, l. 11), in a passage in which Nizāmī speaks suddenly of his beloved wife, Āfāq, he says that her death was due to the evil eye: "As she made my eyes the fount of light, the evil eye removed her from my sight."

²⁰ See Ch. Pellat in *EI*, under *Ghurāb*. In Persian literature, the cawing of a crow is taken as an auspicious omen. In his version of *Laylī and Majnūn*, Jāmī takes

crow does not occur in the Arabic accounts of Majnūn, but does usually appear in 'Udhrite love stories and in classical Arabic *nasīb*, where the bird, with its raucous cry, announces the departure of the tribe, and particularly of the beloved. Descriptions are often offered of the lover who arrives too late at the beloved's encampment and, seeing only the traces of the beloved's abandoned campsite (*aṭlāl*), bursts into tears.²¹ This association of the bird with the vacant place where the beloved has been, led to the expression 'the crow of separation' (*ghurāb al-bayn*).²² In the romance of Qays and Lubnā as reported in al-Iṣfahānī's *al-Aghānī*, the frustrated lover, Lubnā "buys up and kills all the ravens she comes across."²³

Nizāmī depicts the beauty of this bird, comparing its black and shining plumage to the locks of the beloved's hair and to a tenebrous night, and its eyes to gleaming lamps.²⁴ Nizāmī's crow is both

the crow's cawing as a good omen. See Jāmī, *Laylī and Majnūn*, in *Mathnawī-yi haft aurang*, p. 793.

²¹ See J. Stetkevych, "Toward an Arabic Elegiac Lexicon: the seven Words of the Nasīb" in *Reorientations: Arabic and Persian Poetry*, ed. S. Stetkevych, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 58-129. See also R.A. Serrano, "Al-Buhturī's Poetics of Persian Abodes" in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 28, No. 1, March 1997, pp. 69-70. For a treatment of the *aṭlāl* theme in Arabic *ghazals* and its transference from *nasīb* to *ghazal*, see Renate Jacobi, "Themes and Variations in Umayyad Ghazal Poetry" in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 23, part 2, July 1992, pp. 109-19.

²² This topic has also been very popular with Persian poets. See Manūchihri, *Dīwān*, pp. 93 4, *qaṣīda* no. 53.

²³ See Hilary Kilpatrick, "Aḥbār Manzūma: The Romance of Qays and Lubnā in the Aḡānī" in *Festschrift Ewald Wagner zum 65. Geburtstag*, Band 2, Studien zur Arabischen Dichtung, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994, pp. 350-61. For the omen drawn from birds see Th. Nöldeke, in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, under Arabs, p. 671.

²⁴ While the crow sometimes has positive attributes in Persian literature, it is usually considered as a bird of ill-omen, because of the influence of Arabic literature. See Hushang A'lam, in *Elr*, under Crow. See also Ḥusayn Lasān, "Tafa'ul wa taṭayyur" in *Hunar wa mardum*, No. 183, Day, 1357, pp. 30-57. Nizāmī always censures 'a flaw detecting eye' (*dīda-yi 'aybjū*). In *Makhzan al-asrār*, the poet tells the story of Jesus and the body of a dog, by which Jesus teaches his followers to look for virtues and strengths rather than vices and weaknesses. When Jesus and his disciples see a dead dog, the disciples point out its negative qualities. Jesus, however, points to the dog's teeth and compares them to shining pearls. Nizāmī concludes: "Raise your eye from the others' flaw/look at your own face and discern a flaw//In everything there are good and bad qualities/do not look at the bad qualities in order to gain the good ones//In the light, one cannot find the night/in the cage of day, one can see a crow//How could one critique the peacock's leg/when its body is covered with golden feathers//The crow's whole body is black/it has a white eye, look at this whiteness." (*Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, pp. 125-26). The story also occurs in Ghazālī's *Kimīyā*, Vol. 2, p. 87 and in 'Aṭṭār's *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 302. Likewise Nizāmī depicts the owl, which is usually regarded as a bird of ill

the crow of separation and a messenger. The negative aspect of the crow is shown in an allusion to the *Ṣāliḥīyān*, the followers of the prophet Ṣāliḥ, sent to the tribe of Thamūd. Ṣāliḥ's story is recounted in the Koran (11:59–68), but Niẓāmī's allusion is to another Koranic passage, namely 27:47, where the people of Ṣāliḥ's tribe say to him: "We presage evil for you and those who are with you."²⁵

He saw a raven perching upon a branch,
with eyes that you would say [were] lights.
Like the locks of idols, they were black and heart-alluring,
connected to the heart as closely as the liver.
A sober bird, silent as a she-camel;
like Ṣāliḥīyān, it wore black attire.
(ll. 13 5)

Supposing that the crow is mourning for love's sake, Majnūn expects it to understand what he is going through. The crow does not wait to hear all of Majnūn's complaint and flies away, "leaving a brand-mark on Majnūn's heart." Abandoned by the bird, "Majnūn sheds tears until dawn like a candle which consumes itself." The uncouth bird proves to be an ill omen to Majnūn, because it is not long before he hears the news of Laylī's marriage.

3. *Varium et mutabile semper femina*

The most striking example of a prefatory text, which is directly connected to Majnūn's monologue, is his emotional and destructive dialogue with a black camel-driver, who brings the news of Laylī's marriage in chapter 37. This chapter demonstrates the interdependence between the content and tone of a monologue and the framework provided by the narrator. Without the black man's message, which literally breaks Majnūn, the monologue cannot be fully understood. The black man's rude condemnation of the female sex, and his bare and brutal lie, for which he later shows remorse, are part of the preparation for Majnūn's stirring monologue. Before analysing

omen, as a nightingale watching a treasure: "The owl which is inauspicious in the lore/is the nightingale of the treasure in a ruined place." (*Makhzan*, p. 106, l. 5).

²⁵ The word *taṭayyur* (an ill-omen presaged by the flight or sound of a bird, usually a crow or an owl) occurs in two other places in the Koran (36:18–19; 7:131) and is in contrast to *tafa'ul*, a good-omen. The Persian equivalents of these words are *murghuwā* for ill-omen, and *murwā* for a good omen.

the monologue, I shall first present the notorious tirade of the black messenger and Majnūn's immediate reaction:

If there was not one but a thousand women,
there would be little constancy in their promises.
When the image of fidelity and commitment was being drawn,
the pen broke when it arrived at the name of women.
A woman is your friend for but a while
so long as she has not found any amiable person beside you.
When she sits in the embrace of someone else,
she does not want to see you any more.
Although a woman has more passion than a man,
she concentrates on her own desires.
A woman does not play fair, whatever she plays;
whatever she fabricates is nothing save hypocrisy.
Many men have endured woman's infidelity,
and have not seen fidelity in any woman. (. . .)
What is a woman? the focal point of deception;
outwardly peaceful, inwardly quarrelsome.
As regards enmity, she is the plague of the world;
when she strikes up a friendship, she becomes the perdition of your life.
If you say: "do this!" she will not listen;
if you say: "don't do this," she will do it with (the zest of) two men.
When you are suffering for sorrow, she will be delighted;
when you become delighted, she will die of sorrow.
These are the ways of women who play fair:
the conjuration (*afsūn*) of bad women is long.
(ll. 26-32, 34-8)

Hearing this unbecoming speech from that "afflicted" man, Majnūn is so moved that he tears his clothes and madly "hits his head on a stone in such a way/that the whole stone took on the colour of the red rose through his blood." (l. 41) Seeing this "that demon" is ashamed of himself and approaches Majnūn with a thousand excuses, seeking forgiveness by saying that what he had said was all lies and "a two-faced mirror." Afterwards, he tells Majnūn that although Laylī has been forced to marry Ibn Salām, she has kept her promise, and she is thinking only of Majnūn. He also adds that she has not been intimate with her husband and that she is 'sealed' (*muhṛ*, i.e. not yet deflowered).

Unfortunately a number of scholars such as 'A.A. Shihābī, M. Dabīrsiyāqī and P.J. Chelkowski have taken the black man's words and views as those of Niẓāmī.²⁶ But the black man's misogynous statement

²⁶ See *Mirror of the Invisible World*, pp. 67-8. M. Dabīrsiyāqī "Chihra-yi zan dar

should be elated to its function, effect and context in the story, otherwise injustice is done to the text, and the reader's understanding of Nizāmī's views on women is distorted. J. Scott Meisami rightly refutes both Shihābī's and Chelkowski's views. However, although she admits that the statement about women reflects the views of "a black-clad messenger," she does not examine the speaker's character or why the message is put into the mouth of a "demon-like" figure.²⁷ In fact, the messenger is a black man, not a man clad in black as Scott Meisami claims. Shihābī, Dabīrsiyāqī and Chelkowski overlook the narrator's view of the messenger and his message, focusing solely on the contents of the message. The narrator refers to this black person several times, saying that he is 'ignorant' (*ghāfil*), a 'male demon' (*dīw* or *narra-dīw*), 'black day' (*sīyah-rūz*) and a 'liar' (*durūghgū*). The black man's speech is characterised as a 'magical spell' (*afsūn*). The appearance of the messenger is briefly portrayed as follows:

Suddenly a black person, a camel-driver
 passed by Majnūn like a quick serpent. (. . .)
 He blared like a male demon,
 making a clamour like negligent men.
 (ll. 10, 12)

A brief note should be made here on the appearance of the messenger and why such a person is chosen to convey the message. In medieval Persian epics, the antagonist is usually a black person, whose appearance is portrayed in the most appalling and repulsive fashion. He is almost always a 'demon' (*dīw*), a liar and embodies all negative attributes.²⁸ In the *Sharaf-nāma*, in the chapter in which Nizāmī depicts Alexander the Great's wars in Africa, the black men are portrayed in an appalling fashion. They are compared to black serpents, to Ahrīman who feeds on human flesh. Unfortunately negative pre-

Shāh-nāma" in *Firdausī wa Shāh-nāma: majmū'a-yi sī-yu shish guflār*, ed. 'A. Dihbāshī, Tehran: Mudabbir, 1370, p. 128. 'A.A. Shihābī, *Nizāmī, Shā'ir*, p. 206.

²⁷ J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, pp. 166-69.

²⁸ See M. Omidshāh in *ELr*, under *Dīw*. Here Omidshāh shows that many of the antagonists appearing in Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma* are black. The portrait of the black man in Nizāmī's work is very negative. In *Sharaf-nāma*, the poet depicts him as an enemy of Alexander. In *Dārāb-nāma*, one of the black opponents of Dārāb is depicted as follows: "The executioner came, as black as ink. Each of his arms was like the thighs of a camel. He stood as tall as the tower of a fortress, with a head upon him like a bleacher's cauldron. He had two eyes like two plates. His teeth were yellow and he had tusks projecting out of his mouth (. . .)." See Tarsūsī, *Dārāb-nāma*, Vol. 1, pp. 72, 96.

sentations of black men abound in classical Persian literature. This may stem from Zoroastrianism, where anything black was regarded as pertaining to Ahrīman. The advent of Islam did not really change the Iranian view in this respect, first because the new religion was itself influenced by Iranian angelology and demonology, and second because of the strong impact of Greek philosophy, and particularly of Aristotelianism, which taught a hierarchy of creation. Thus the philosopher Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī writes gracelessly in his *Taṣawwūrāt*, in the section on the superiority of man over the animal creation:

Man is superior to all animals by his greater force, by ability of speech and clear reasoning which he has. If (various kinds of) men are taken, from the first, and one placed after another, like the Negro from Zanzibar, in the Southern-most countries, the Negro does not differ from an animal in anything except the fact that his hands have been lifted from the earth—in no other peculiarity or property—except for what God wishes. Many have seen that an ape is more capable of being trained than the Negro, and more intelligent.²⁹

As M. Omidasalar has pointed out, meeting with unattractive or deformed individuals was considered a bad omen.³⁰ The black messenger is presented as a liar who whips up Majnūn's emotions by projecting a false picture of Laylī engaged in making love to her imposed spouse:

She prepares herself to serve her husband;
he coils around her and she does not protest.
Every day she leans her ear on his ear
while embraced by her own husband.
Her occupation is solely kissing and cuddling;
why are you occupying yourself with the sorrow of her affair?
(ll. 21–3)

He then tells Majnūn that Laylī will not think of him for years and that he should not think of her. It is after this that the messenger delivers his censure of the female sex, in order to console Majnūn. The messenger's speech cannot be taken as Nizāmī's own view of women, but neither is it a "parody of the courtly concept of love" as has been suggested by J. Scott Meisami.³¹ The messenger's tirade

²⁹ As translated by W. Ivanow and cited by A.J. Arberry in *Classical Persian Literature*, Richmond: Curzon Press, reprint 1994, p. 255.

³⁰ M. Omidasalar in *Elr*, under Divination.

³¹ J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 168.

is an *afsūn*, which is a magical spell with the connotation of trickery, which serves to whet Majnūn's emotions and prepare him for his psychological release. As M. Tharwat has suggested, the black man's message may also point to the patriarchal Bedouin society, in which women were treated differently.³² Moreover, the message can be taken as an allusion to the renunciation of earthly love and its imperfection. Persian romances almost always contain a severe censure of woman, who is regarded as an impediment to a higher sort of love. In Jāmī's *Salamān and Absāl*, a learned physician uses an identical vocabulary to persuade a king not to marry any woman.³³

Although Majnūn's reaction to the black man's tirade is prefaced by the narrator's usual comments, drawing the reader's attention to Majnūn's poor state, the actual trigger for his monologue is the news of Laylī's marriage to Ibn Salām. As the narrator says in chapter 38:4: "The one who suffered sorrow for her, suffered another anguish/when he learned the news of her betrothal." Like Majnūn's previous speech, this *ghazal* is wrapped in the form of a message:

He was telling her in the language of the wind:
 "O my beloved, you who have found delight with your beloved,
 Where is that sitting together you and I,
 entering into a covenant with a thousand pledges?
 Where is that offering hope of union,
 and laying one's head on the line of compliance?
 To claim to be a loving friend,
 to give hope for fidelity,
 And today, to break the covenant
 and conceal the face of innocence from me.
 Imagine that your heart turned to the way of fidelity,
 where is that claim of friendship? (. . .)
 I have purchased your love with my life,
 you have chosen the love of someone else.
 Is it right to forget one's promise in this way
 not remembering the other even for a moment?
 Are you so happy with your new beloved
 that you do not remember your old intimate?
 Now that you are embracing someone else,
 do not forget us with your tongue. (. . .)

³² M. Tharwat, *Ganjīna-yi hikmat*, pp. 222-23.

³³ *Salamān wa Absāl* in *Mathnawī-yi haft aurang*, pp. 331-33; also see Gurgānī, *Wīs u Rāmīn*, pp. 97-8, ll. 111-31; Niẓāmī, *Khusrāu u Shīrīn*, ed. Tharwatiyān, pp. 347-48, ll. 19-27; *Sharaf-nāma*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 290, ll. 2-8.

Although your date is agreeable,
 it is a thorn to everyone except me. (. . .)
 You have deluded me with promise and oath
 in order that I be yours with love and attachment.
 Look at your oath, was it faithful?
 look at your attachment, was it true?
 You have given your heart to someone else,
 and felt no shame before my sight.
 In the Cycle (*daur*, i.e. world) there is not only you and I,
 so pain is combined with oppression.
 There are other curious forces in action
 counting good and evil [deeds].
 They will see that I have suffered sorrow from you,
 how I have treated you, and how you have treated me.
 If you imagine that both my eyes are covered,
 there would still be others who are watching.
 When they examine compliance with the covenant,
 what can they say, save to call you, 'Covenant-breaker'
 It is not propitious to break a covenant,
 beware, before breaking the cradle.
 Unless the rose breaks the covenant of the rose-bed,
 Time (*zamāna*) will not break a thorn in its heart.
 Unless the wine breaks the faces of ruffians,
 their broken names are not revealed.
 Unless the night breaks the cup of the moon,
 it will not become black-faced as a result.
 With which heart shall I hope for you?
 with which face shall I smile again at you?
 (ll. 9-14, 16 19, 22, 26-38)

Despite these sour complaints, expressing Majnūn's melancholic mood,
 he declares that he still loves Laylī fervently:

There is nothing else I can do,
 but to offer my life to you,
 And come to an understanding with your fidelity,
 ignoring your injustice and cruelty.
 I will be patient with you,
 waiting till life pulls on the reins.
 (ll. 58-60)

Describing Majnūn as egocentric, J. Scott Meisami has analysed
 the above passage as follows: "The manner in which this '*ghazal*' is
 introduced leaves no doubt as to the poet's evaluation of it: Maj-
 nūn is even madder than his name. His madness is patent in his
 reversion to the familiar self-image: literature wins out over life. The

self-centeredness of the passage is remarkable, as is its destructiveness; if he cannot have Laylī (and it is clear that he will not), no one will."³⁴ Scott Meisami's reading overlooks the genre in which Majnūn's message is placed, the function of the black man's message and Majnūn's immediate emotional response. In this monologue, Majnūn speaks to the *khayāl* of Laylī. The *khayāl* or *ṭayf*, is a 'vision,' 'phantasm' or 'apparition' of the beloved which often appears by night to the lover-poet. It is not merely a dream but, as Renate Jacobi has put it, a "spectre confronting the poet in the external world."³⁵

The *khayāl* is one of the favourite motifs in Persian love poetry. Its origin is uncertain, but it is found in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry and is often employed by 'Udhrite poets. In addition to its frequent occurrence in *ghazals*, and in the prologues to odes (*qaṣīdas*), it is usually found in epic romances such as Gurgānī's *Wīs and Rāmīn*, which is a totally Iranian production going back to the Parthian period.³⁶ It is associated with the lover's secret longings, his pangs of separation, his complaint of her cruelty and infidelity and his quarrels with her. The *khayāl* of the beloved is often described with martial vocabulary: she comes raiding at night, shooting arrows from her eyebrows and throwing lances with her glance. One of the early appearances of the *khayāl* motif in Persian is in Aḥmad Ghazālī's *Sawānīh*, where the author in a quoted poem describes how the lover is attacked during his sleep by the beloved: "The *khayāl* of my beloved Turk becomes like the attributes of my [own] essence every night/in my own attributes, she stations thousands of sentinels."³⁷ The poem is used to explain how love drinks the existence of the lover. Love con-

³⁴ J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, pp. 168–69.

³⁵ For the occurrence of this motif in Arabic literature see R. Jacobi, "Al-Khayālani" in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 27, 1996, pp. 2–12; see also idem, "The Khayāl Motif in Early Arabic Poetry" in *Oriens*, 1990, 32, pp. 50–64.

³⁶ In explaining the *khayāl* motif in Rūmī's famous story of the love between a king and a concubine from Samarqand, B.Z. Furūzānfar cites Ibn Sīnā as saying that "anything which has dimensions without any external substance falls under the category of *khayāl*." Describing the appearance of the spiritual physician in this story, Rūmī compares him to a *khayāl* and also gives a definition of the term: "He was approaching from a distance like the new moon/he was non-existent and existed in the form of a *khayāl*//the *khayāl* is like non-existence within the soul/ behold, a world floats upon a *khayāl*//man's war and peace depend on a *khayāl*,/man's pride and disgrace depend on a *khayāl*." See B. Furūzānfar, *Sharḥ-i mathnawī-yi sharīf*, Vol. 1, pp. 65–70.

³⁷ *Sawānīh*, p. 7, *fasl* 2, ll. 13–4. The poem forms the *maṭlaʿ* of a *ghazal* (no. 562) in Rūmī's *Dīwān*. See *Dīwān-i kabīr*, p. 21.

tures the vision of the beloved in the mind of the lover, who because of insomnia calls up this vision to such an intense degree that his mind becomes entirely absorbed in it. Anything perceived then takes on the form of the beloved in the lover's eyes. As Ghazālī says: "Since I have focused my eyes on your *khayāl* so intensely/wherever I cast my glance, I discern someone like you."³⁸

Ghazālī's treatment is interesting in that he says that if the lover sees the beloved in his sleep, he is still looking at himself.³⁹ He makes a distinction between seeking the beloved's inner self and her outward form. If the lover sees the beloved's *khayāl* in his sleep, it is because he has seen something with his heart's eye, something that cannot be grasped by reason. Having entered the lover, the *khayāl* becomes part of himself and his companion.⁴⁰ The lover desires, on the one hand, to remain asleep, but on the other hand, seeing her warlike appearance and attitude, he also wants to free himself from the nightmare.

Majnūn is confronted with a vision of Laylī after he has heard from the misogynous black man that Laylī is betrothed to Ibn Salām. Under the impact of this brusque message, and the haunting of the *khayāl*, Majnūn breaks down physically and mentally. Nizāmī says that "Majnūn's angelic-hued reason" become even more insane, falling like an exhausted and wing-broken bird. As a master dramatist, Nizāmī works out the effect of the message on Majnūn in this *khayāl* section, which tangibly displays Majnūn's anger, despair, and break-down.

The place and effect of the *khayāl* motif in an 'Udhrite romance has not yet been systematically studied. The motif can be considered as an emotional outburst. In this subconscious state, the chaste lover, who always accedes to the wishes of his unrequited beloved, finds an opportunity to complain, accuse and even curse the beloved. In this *khayāl* passage, Majnūn accuses her of infidelity and inconstancy, blaming her of having broken her promise. There is, however,

³⁸ *Sawānīh*, p. 6, *fasl* 2, l. 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51, *fasl* 31 (1), ll. 2-4; for an elaborated treatment of Ghazālī's mystical view on *khayāl* see N. Pūrjawādī "'Ālam-i khayāl az nazar-i Aḥmad-i Ghazālī" in *Ma'ārif*, Vol. 3, No. 2, November 1986, pp. 3-54; for this theme in Sanā'i's lyrics see F.D. Lewis, *Reading, Writing*, pp. 472-73. For Arabic literature see J. Seybold, "The Earliest Demon Lover: The 'Ṭayf al-khayāl in al-Mufaḍḍalīyāt" in *Reorientations: Arabic and Persian Poetry*, ed. S. Stetkevych, Bloomington: 1994, pp. 180-89.

⁴⁰ *Sawānīh*, p. 82, *fasl* 56, l. 7.

no explicit mention of such a covenant in the preceding chapters and Majnūn must have made up this covenant so that he has a justification for blaming Laylī of inconstancy. The narrator makes only a passing reference to such a covenant in chapter 37. Majnūn's accusation is to be understood within the conventions of 'promise and covenant' in traditional Arabic *nasīb*, and not as a sign of Majnūn's madness. In the Arabic *nasīb*, the lover usually believes that he has the right to see the beloved, and therefore, when the beloved does not act according to the wishes of the lover, she is accused of infidelity and unfaithfulness.⁴¹

4. *The elegiac monologue*

Majnūn also sings elegies when Laylī or one of his family members dies. It is mentioned in the poem that, for instance, when Laylī perishes, Majnūn recites lamentations (*nauḥa-garī*) (63:39), a kind of poetry belonging to the genre of *marthiya*, 'elegy' or 'dirge'.⁴² Here, in line with the traditional *marthiya* conventions, Majnūn blames fate for Laylī's death, using garden imagery and the contrasting motifs of spring and autumn. He poses rhetorical questions about her untimely death, using euphemisms for dying. He names her praiseworthy qualities and universalises Laylī's death by describing how man and nature are crying for her. Finally, he prays for her happiness in the hereafter and promises to join her soon. When Zayd brings the news of Laylī's death, Majnūn protests to God:

Must this lightning be poured upon a plant?
Does one fight with an ant in this way?
A torrent of blood should be given to the measure of the cup;
a goblet should be given with the measure of gratification.
(ll. 25, 27)

Afterwards, Majnūn begins to weep and to sing the following elegy for his deceased beloved in chapter 62:

When Majnūn saw the beauty of her grave from a distance,
he fell down as a shadow falls from light. (. . .)

⁴¹ See J.C. Vadet, *L'esprit courtois*, p. 51.

⁴² See W.L. Hanaway, in *EL*, under *Marthiya*.

Because of all the tulip-hued (i.e. red) tears he shed,
 tulips appeared amidst the grass of her grave.
 Like a candle, he refined his liver's blood [tears],
 untying his fire-tinted tongue:
 "O what shall I do, what is my solution
 for I am burning in pain like a candle? (. . .)
 This old dry tree (the world), which acts like enemies,
 has taken her from me through the wound of a javelin.
 I had a fresh rose in my hand,
 the wind blew and broke its leaves.
 I chose a noble cypress in the meadow,
 the hand of death (*qjal*) delivered her to perdition. (. . .)
 I chose a basil-faced [beloved] in this world,
 except for her countenance, I saw nothing in the world.
 A thief rushed out of his ambush,
 breaking the basil, he threw it on the path.
 My 'queen of the fortress' is in this condition;
 This is why I watch this fortress."
 (ll. 41, 44-6, 48-50, 54-6)

Majnūn also composes elegies on the death of his father and mother. These poems are more or less the same in content, imagery and language, except that in his elegy for Laylī he relies on garden imagery, whereas in others he exhibits remorse towards his parents and refers to his own shortcomings.

5. *Majnūn's celebrity as a poet and transmitters of his poetry*

In the Arabic sources, people visit Majnūn in the hope of gathering the treasures of his poems. Likewise in Nizāmī's poem there are several characters who visit Majnūn and collect his poetry. The earliest reference is in chapter 18:13-4:

Each couplet that came from his mouth
 was memorised by the people.
 Everyone became bewildered in his trace
 they were looking at him and crying for him.

Although Majnūn's fame as a poet draws people's sympathy and attention, it is his reputation as a poet-lover that dishonours the name of his lady and her tribe. Eventually his popularity becomes a deadly threat to him. When Laylī's clan learn how Majnūn publicly sings love songs for Laylī, they go to their chief who orders

that he may be killed with impunity. According to the tribal rules of ancient Arabia, if one of the members of a tribe was disgraced, the other members, including the chief, were obliged to take action for the sake of the tribe's good name. The people of Laylī's clan complain:

Every time he composes another love lyric
 (and he has both good lyrics and a good voice),
 With every lyric that he composes,
 he defames our name constantly.⁴³
 He sings poems and people memorise them,
 exposing us and you [to the world].
 Laylī is burning because of his clamour;
 this wind (Majnūn) is the death of that light (Laylī).
 (chapter 20, ll. 9-12)

In chapter 23, after rejecting his father's advice that he should leave Laylī, Majnūn rushes to her quarter "like a frenzied lion," singing love songs. Here, the narrator emphasises the popularity of his poems:

From every direction, innumerable crowds
 encircled the mountain, looking at Majnūn,
 Each rare thing people heard from him they collected,
 either in their memories or written with their pens,
 By taking his poetry to the quarters of the world as gifts
 the lovers prospered from those songs.
 (ll. 28-30)

In chapter 24, in a description of Laylī's physical and mental state, Majnūn's poetry plays a paramount part:

In any corner of her home where she looked,
 she was confronted with a love lyric.
 Each youth returning from the bazaar
 sang a couplet naming their love.
 Everyone who passed beneath Laylī's veranda
 brought her a message in rhyme.
 (ll. 53-5)

The fame of Majnūn's poetry becomes an effective means of communication between the lovers. In the early stages of their love relationship, Laylī receives Majnūn's messages by hearing them from a passer-by, or the messages are secretly thrown into her house by

⁴³ This hemistich can also be rendered as follows, "he constantly ravishes a hundred women."

people who sympathise with the lovers. Like Majnūn, Laylī secretly composes charming poems and throws them from the roof onto the street so that passers-by may bring them to Majnūn.

Another explicit reference to the popularity of Majnūn's poems and how they were collected occurs in chapter 54, in which Salām of Baghdād, a passionate lover and an admirer of poetry, hears Majnūn's beautiful songs. Here the universality of Majnūn's poetry is underscored:

When through his poems, which were scattered like pearls,
the story of Qays became revealed to the world,
In every direction, due to his pure nature,
people sang his sorrowful love poems.
Every sorrow-stricken person, who read his poems,
rushed by camel towards Majnūn.
As the fame of his love reached
from town to town as far as Baghdad,
The 'Refined men' (*ẓarīfs*) performed musical worship (*samāʿ*)
and their rivals used Majnūn's licit composition (*naẓm-i ḥalāl*).
(ll. 7-11)

In the last couplet, we see that his poems were used by Sufis in their devotional meetings (*samāʿ*),⁴⁴ and in a profane sense by 'elegant men'.⁴⁵ Indirectly, this directs the reader to interpret the poems in both senses. Nizāmī is also criticising theologians such as Ibn al-Jauzī, who severely condemned the use of profane poetry for spiritual purposes, by describing Majnūn's erotic poetry as 'licit.'

Salām of Baghdād is so impressed by Majnūn's poetry that he makes a long journey to visit him and collect his poetry. Salām even chooses the bitterness of exile for the sake of Majnūn: "I have chosen exile for the sake of you/because I have heard your rare poems." (l. 27) Salām then expresses his ardent love for poetry:

Whatever poems you may compose,
I will memorise them in the core of my soul.
I will learn your discourse in such a way
that my ego will be adorned with them.
(ll. 31-2)

⁴⁴ For this mystical practice see, J. During in *EI*, under *Samāʿ*.

⁴⁵ The *ẓarīfs* are sometimes connected to courtly love. See T. Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung*, pp. 59-60; W. Raven, *Ibn Dāwūd*, index, under *Ẓarf*; Vadet, *L'esprit courtois*, p. 215; S. Enderwitz, *Liebe als Beruf*, see the indices under *Ẓarf* and *Ẓarīf*.

Having lived with Majnūn for a short while, Salām learns that he cannot assimilate his life-style with Majnūn's austere ascetic life. He returns to Baghdad, taking with him a rich treasure which dazzles the mind of everyone:

Then Salām returned to Baghdad,
having learned many odes by heart.
Wherever he sang an ode,
its beauty confounded the mind of the listener.

(ll. 113-14)

In chapter 65, Zayd, a lover similar to Majnūn, who carries letters between Laylī and Majnūn, is portrayed as the actual collector of Majnūn's legend and his poetry. Zayd is said to have been sitting on the grave of Laylī and Majnūn, listening to the pilgrims who visit the lovers' shrine:

Zayd, that good man who fostered love
(a hundred graces from God on that chivalrous man),
Never took a step beyond the shrine
of those two springs of light.
The couplets that those two had bored like the ruby,
the poems on their states they had made,
He searched for them by way of the eye, and by the sense of hearing,
and when he found them, he collected them.
He did not hide this love-tale from the ear of anyone,
so that whoever might hear it, would say: 'bravo.'
The legend of these two soul-mates
was revealed to the world through Zayd.

(ll. 1-6)

6. *Conclusions*

Several conclusions can be drawn in connection to Majnūn's poetic genius. Firstly, being separated from Laylī and having no access to her, the only means by which Majnūn can communicate with her is his poetry, which is so popular that it is on the lips of everyone in the town. Secondly, Niẓāmī presents both Majnūn and Laylī not merely as lovers but also as lovers of poetry. Laylī is a gifted poetess and composes elegant rhymes for Majnūn. In several places, Laylī fervently longs to hear Majnūn's poems. Even during their momentary meetings, instead of embracing each other, Laylī listens courteously to Majnūn's poems and admires them. She often invites

Majnūn to sing her a song. In their occasional unions, the consummation of their love is achieved by singing poetry: which arouses their emotions to the extent that they sometimes swoon away.

Another conclusion is that Majnūn discloses his mind to the reader through his love-lyrics and elegies. These poems serve as extended psychological self-analyses, revealing the lover's frustration and offering reasons for the actions and behaviour of the ostensibly mad lover. Such poems provide a pause in which Majnūn can review the past and to make plans for the future. When Majnūn sings his songs, the reader is allowed to look into his most intimate thoughts. When given access to a character's confidential thoughts and his emotionally laden statements, the reader is disposed to sympathise with him and to rely on his words. Furthermore, the narrator plays an indispensable role in dramatising Majnūn's state. He always describes Majnūn's environment, his poor outward appearance and his complaints. One of the important aspects of the narrator's role is to comment on Majnūn's speech. He always chooses the side of Majnūn, a fact that influences the reader's interpretation.

In describing the popularity of Majnūn's poems and the way they are transmitted, Nizāmī emphasises the oral quality of Majnūn's poetry. Every mention of the transmitters of Majnūn's poetry includes references to the 'ear,' and the poem's oral use. Majnūn's poetry is said to be universally popular, sung by people in various walks of life from Sufis to refined persons. The chief transmitters of Majnūn's poetry, such as Salām of Baghdad and Zayd, are presented as lovers, who can feel Majnūn's agony. When they approach Majnūn, they assure him that they too have exerted themselves on the path of love. The fact that they appreciate Majnūn's poems and collect them is of secondary importance, compared to their love. By making this close connection between love and poetry, Nizāmī is emphasising that unfulfilled passionate love is a prerequisite for producing poetry.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE IDEAL BELOVED

*aṣl-i hama 'āshiqī zi dīdār uṣṭad
chun dāda bidīd āngahī kār uṣṭad
dar dām ba ṭama' murgh-i bisyār uṣṭad
parwāna ba ṭama'-i nūr dar nār uṣṭad*

*The cause of falling in love begins with a glance,
When the eye sees, infatuation falls to work
Many birds have fallen into a trap because of desire
The moth falls in the fire for light's desire.¹*

1. Majnūn's relationship with Laylī

An analysis of the relationship between Laylī and Majnūn reveals important aspects of the interaction between men and women in Islamic culture. The majority of scholars have focused solely on Majnūn, giving little attention to Laylī and the way she influences Majnūn. Critics have expressed diverse views of the lovers. J. Scott Meisami characterises Majnūn's love for Laylī as "excessive devotion to a single purpose. (. . .) the ultimate object of Majnūn's adoration is not Laylī herself, but his own self-image as lover."² Although Scott Meisami claims that, after Naufal, Majnūn's parents and Ibn Salām, Laylī is "the final victim of Majnūn's passion," she does not discuss Laylī's relationship with Majnūn, to explain why Laylī is a victim.³ Scott Meisami accuses Laylī of being a passive character undertaking no action; she emphasises that "moral passivity is a key issue" in the poem, and Laylī:

for her part, lives only for the thought of Majnūn; but her steadfastness (. . .) reflects a passivity that is at odds with the imagery of fertility and verdancy with which she is associated. She herself is the final victim of Majnūn's passion. When he rejects her, unable to abandon

¹ *Sawānīh*, p. 40, *faṣl* 21 (1), ll. 6-7.

² J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, pp. 159-60.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

the image created by his mind of the real woman, she dies of grief, after enjoining her mother to adorn her as a bride before placing her in her tomb. Desert has triumphed over garden.⁴

‘Alī Akbar Sa‘īdī Sīrjānī also has a negative opinion of Laylī. He misrepresents Laylī’s character and situation by placing her in a harem (which does not exist in the poem), which he condemns as a token of a primitive life-style. In fact neither Laylī’s father nor her husband have a harem.⁵ Keeping harems, practising polygamy, concubinage and other pleasures of the flesh were well-practised Persian customs, and became possible for the Arabs after the acquisition of the empire.⁶ Sīrjānī overlooks all Laylī’s positive qualities, insisting that she belongs to the category of hypocrites (*riyākārān*).⁷ Sīrjānī further states:

What is even stranger is that Laylī never protests and lives a submissive life. She is taken away from the school and is imprisoned in a locked house. She does not complain, she does not cry out of protest. (...) Without allowing her to see her future husband and without asking her opinion, she is delivered to an ill-tempered man. Still she remains submissive and accepts orders. What she undertakes is crying and lamenting in the harem of her husband.⁸

In contrast to the views of Sa‘īdī Sīrjānī and Scott Meisami, Manṣūr Tharwat believes that *Laylī and Majnūn* and *Khusrau and Shīrīn* are unique in Persian literature because of the outspoken roles played by the female characters. In both romances, the distinct moral elements derive from the heroines: Shīrīn is chaster, wiser, and trustworthier than Khusrau, and Laylī is sometimes taken to have a higher position than Majnūn, since she concealed her love while Majnūn revealed it.⁹ In further analysing Laylī’s character, Tharwat states:

In his portrayal of Laylī, Nizāmī displays his own and her rebellion against the coercions of life (*ijbār-hā-yi zīstān*) derived from a wrong and inhuman system. Although she is given to Ibn Salām forcefully and

⁴ Ibid., p. 162.

⁵ *Sīmā-yi du zan*. See especially the introduction.

⁶ See A.J. Arberry’s introduction to his translation of Ibn Ḥazm’s *The Ring of the Dove: a Treatise on the Art and Practice of Arab Love*, trans. A.J. Arberry, London: Luzac, 1953. Such practices also occur in Gurgānī’s *Wīs and Rāmīn*.

⁷ Sa‘īdī Sīrjānī, *Sīmā-yi du zan*, pp. 31–2, 129.

⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

⁹ M. Tharwat, *Ganjīna-yi ḥikmat*, pp. 226–27.

against her wish, Nizāmī develops Laylī's character in such a way that she fights instead of giving up. Laylī's action in slapping Ibn Salām's face and her refusal to rely on him are symbolic acts against the medieval system and society's lack of respect for women.¹⁰

'Alī Mubārīz interprets not only *Laylī and Majnūn*, but also Nizāmī's other writings within his Marxist ideological framework. He sees Laylī's agony as reflecting on the feudal system of the Bedouin Arabs in which "woman had no right" and "was deprived of the light of the world; she could be bought and sold."¹¹ Other scholars such as P.J. Chelkowski and A. Bombaci share the view that Nizāmī has given Laylī a psychological profile that is "less complex" than that of Majnūn.¹² Although Laylī speaks less often than Majnūn, the poet treats her physical and moral qualities, her fervid emotions, her relationship with other characters, her paradoxes and above all her fragile position in the patriarchal society of the romance.

The previously mentioned studies fail to draw a clear picture of the relationship between Laylī and Majnūn. They are either ideologically orientated or lack the basic scholarly criterion, namely objectivity. J. Scott Meisami's analysis is unsatisfactory because she excludes a mystical interpretation; Sa'īdī Sīrjānī's approach is far from accurate, and aims at extolling the lifestyle of Persian women which, in his view, is manifested in the character of Shīrīn, while criticising the Bedouin Arab lifestyle. Other scholars have viewed Nizāmī's work in its totality without making any close analysis of the relationship between Laylī and Majnūn. In what follows, an attempt is made to throw some light on various aspects of the lovers' relationship.

2. *The beloved's quality and the experience of falling in love*

The fascinating way Majnūn falls in love with Laylī and becomes literally 'possessed' (*majnūn*) by her beauty raises a number of fundamental questions, which should be answered before analysing their actual relationship. The first question concerns how and why Majnūn

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 226; see also B. Tharwatīyān, *Guzīda-yi makhzan al-asrār*, Tehran: Tūs, 1372, p. 35, who shares Tharwat's view and characterises Laylī as a representative of the mystic woman.

¹¹ See *Ẓindagī wa andīsha-yi Nizāmī*, p. 79.

¹² See P.J. Chelkowski, *Mirror of the Invisible World*, p. 67; see also A. Bombaci in *Laylī and Majnūn by Fuzūlī*, p. 74.

becomes spell-bound by Laylī's beauty. Secondly, what are the physical and psychical qualities of Laylī that prompt Majnūn to abandon himself to the image of his beloved?

Although Laylī's physical appearance has been an object of fascination and a catalyst for mystics to explain the divine Beauty through an earthly medium, from as early as the ninth century, there has been a tendency to focus on her moral traits rather than her physical appearance. Nizāmī, on the other hand, at several points expatiates only on her physical beauty and how she captivates Majnūn. The lovers' relationship begins as soon as they fall in love with each other. In the Arabic sources, the lovers meet in the desert, but Nizāmī civilises their meeting by placing them in a traditional Islamic school (*maktab*). The result is somewhat inconsistent because in Islamic Arab public life, as in Bedouin society, male and female were segregated, and this segregation is emphasised by Nizāmī himself throughout the story. In Nizāmī's works, the characters often fall in love through hearing one another, or by seeing the portrait of their future beloved, as in the cases of Khusrau and Shīrīn and Bahrām and his seven princesses.¹³ Their falling in love at school is not Nizāmī's own invention: a century before 'Ayyūqī, in his 'Udhrite romance *Warqa and Gulshāh*, had told how the lovers fell in love at a very young age and later attended school together.¹⁴ Nizāmī's school scene is similar to 'Ayyūqī's treatment.

The way Majnūn falls in love with Laylī resembles a popular theme, rooted in Persian folklore, in which a young prince is smitten with the love of a fairy. Examples of this kind of love abound in Persian literature: in Khājū-yi Kirmānī's *Humā and Humāyūn*, *Gul and Naurūz* and several stories in the *Thousand and One Nights* for example. The pattern in the Persian fairy tales is that the fairy usually

¹³ There are different ways of falling in love: 1) By sight: when the curtain of Wīs' litter is lifted by the wind, Rāmīn sees her and falls in love with her. Also in 'Aṭṭār's romance *Rābi'a and Biktāsh*, when Rābi'a sees Biktāsh from the roof of her palace, she falls in love with him. 2) In a dream: in Jamālī's *The Moon and the Sun*, and in several versions of *Yūsuf and Zulaikha*, the lovers fall in love with each other in dreams. 3) By seeing a portrait of the beloved, as in the stories of Khusrau and Shīrīn, Bahrām and the seven princesses, Humā and Humāyūn; 4) Through hearing the description of the beloved, as in Naurūz and Gul. 5) By hearing the voice of the beloved, like Farhād and Shīrīn; 6) On seeing one another at school, as in Laylī and Majnūn, and Warqa and Gulshāh. 7) By growing together from childhood, like Sūdāba and Siyāwush and Zulaikha and Yūsuf (in some versions).

¹⁴ See 'Ayyūqī, *Warqa u Gulshāh*, p. 46. The meeting of Laylī and Majnūn at school is taken over by later poets such as Rūmī. See *Fihī mā fihī*, p. 184, ll. 19–21.

appears to a hunting prince in the form of a fair gazelle. Delighted by such an elegant prey, the prince chases the beast for days until he is totally exhausted. Then, he falls in a deep sleep and when he awakes, he finds himself in a paradisiacal environment, sitting before an ethereal maiden who bewitches the prince so that he falls in love with her. When the fairy has enchanted him through her eyes, she disappears. The fairy's disappearance initiates the perpetual task of the prince who undertakes long and arduous journeys, wearing out his iron shoes and undergoing many trials. The lover-prince does anything to achieve the object of his love. He is in an entranced state and thinks only of the fairy. In other words, the fairy possesses human beings or leads them into madness through her charm.

In the same way, as soon as Majnūn meets Laylī, he falls in love with her. However, when her father finds out about their love, he immediately takes Laylī away from Majnūn's sight. Because Laylī has become unattainable, Majnūn is roused first to go to the area around his beloved's house, and when he is barred from the neighbourhood, to search for his beloved in his mind. The main difference between this and the stories of a Persian prince and a fairy is that Majnūn starts an internal journey, whereas the Persian prince embarks upon an external journey. As a result, Majnūn's way of achieving his goal may seem static compared to the outward dynamism of the Persian prince. Majnūn experiences several stages of self-knowledge by concentrating on ontological issues such as destiny, life, love and death, whereas the prince gains awareness through his laborious adventures.

In order to use the fairy-tale pattern, Nizāmī has to change some aspects of the original Bedouin story. For instance, he makes the Bedouin boy into a kind of prince, and Laylī into something like a princess, by portraying their fathers as rich and influential personalities. Majnūn's father is like a childless king who is desperately longing for an heir. Majnūn and Laylī are brought up like a prince and a princess. They attend a school and are educated persons; they both have an exceptional poetic talent. Nizāmī bestows on Laylī all the ideal virtues of female perfection both physical and moral, to an extent that no poet before him had done. The Arabic sources contain only passing references to Laylī's physical appearance.¹⁵ Ibn

¹⁵ See A.E. Khairallah, *Love, Madness*, p. 138; A. Miquel, *Majnūn et Laylā*, pp. 117-18.

Qutayba refers to Laylī, as “moon-faced,” a conventional metaphor. Al-Wālibī focuses his attention more on Laylī’s moral virtues than her physical charm.

In Persian anecdotes prior to Niẓāmī’s era, Laylī is often portrayed as ugly.¹⁶ Her lack of charm and Majnūn’s immeasurable fascination with her became a favourite subject for poets throughout the centuries. Niẓāmī must have known some of these anecdotal accounts, in mystical texts and folk literature. Several mystic poets depict Laylī as a bony and tawny complexioned person. ‘Aṭṭār, who recounts several anecdotes in his works about Laylī and Majnūn, tells in the *Muṣibat-nāma* that when Majnūn’s love for Laylī became public, the ‘Abbāsīd caliph Hārūn ar-Rashīd (145–193/763–809) grew curious about Laylī’s beauty, which had driven Majnūn insane. He summoned them both to his court and, on seeing Laylī’s face, he was surprised. He asked Majnūn how could he possibly be attracted to her. Majnūn simply answers that beauty is in the eye of the beholder:

O king: there is no flaw in the beauty of that idol,
the flaw lies in the glance.
If you look at her through my eyes
you will not find rest even of her alley’s dust.¹⁷

Niẓāmī’s portrayal of Laylī is drawn from a substantially different perspective; the poet closely follows the literary conventions of the beloved in Persian amatory literature. In his skilled hands, the tawny-faced Arab girl becomes a bright and ravishing fairy, a blooming garden, a skilful hunter, a soldier and a magician. Before starting our examination of Niẓāmī’s portrayal of Laylī, it is helpful to give a brief background of how the beloved is usually portrayed in Persian. In the conventional portraiture of the beloved, she possesses a constellation of attributes drawn mainly from the terminology of gardening, hunting, weaponry and magic. Since Persian does not

¹⁶ See M. Mīr ‘Ābidīnī, “‘Arūsān-i shīr-i Fārsī” in *Sukhan*, Vol. 23, No. 6, Day: 1351, pp. 639–40.

¹⁷ ‘Aṭṭār, *Muṣibat-nāma*, pp. 138–39. For other references see ‘Aṭṭār, *Muṣibat-nāma*, pp. 279–80; Rūmī, *Fihī mā fihī*, pp. 51, 72; idem, *Mathnawī*, Vol. 1, pp. 27–8, Vol. 5, pp. 158–60; Shams-i Tabrizī, *Maqālāt-i Shams-i Tabrizī*, ed. M.A. Muwaḥḥid, Tehran: Dībā, 1369, p. 105; B.Z. Furūzānfār, *Ma’ākhidh-i qīṣaṣ wa tamthīlāt-i mathnawī*, Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1347, pp. 8–9. Waḥshī Bāfiqī, *Shīrīn u Farhād* in *Dīwān-i Waḥshī Bāfiqī*, p. 426; Muḥammad Ma’šūm Shīrāzī, *Tarā’iq al-haqā’iq*, ed. M.J. Mahjūb, Tehran: Sanā’ī, Vol. 1, pp. 409–10. Sa’dī, *Gulistān*, p. 144.

distinguish gender in nouns or in personal pronouns, the beloved's gender can be ambiguous. In lyrics it often is ambiguous, but in romances the beloved is usually a female. For the Persian poet the gender of the beloved is less important; what counts is an archetypal depiction of the beloved who transcends any sex distinction. As J. Scott Meisami has pointed out: "In the courtly *ghazal*, it is not the sex or even the "real" status (human or transcendent) of the beloved that is of primary importance, but the qualities she embodies. The beloved (whether youth, man, or woman, slave or free, or God Himself) is accorded absolute supremacy in the love relationship because she is, by definition, the noblest of creation; her word is law unto the lover, over whom she holds the power of life and death."¹⁸

The beloved's physical beauty is usually described using garden imagery. She is an adorned garden, a perfect garden in Paradise. Her slender stature is usually compared to the noble cypress; her lips are likened to red tulips and purest ruby; teeth are pearls from the finest waters or sparkling stars; the mouth is as small as a red blooming rose-bud; her hair is as smooth as the violet and as black as a tenebrous night; long hair is often preferred and is metaphorically compared to the longest night of the year (*shab-i yaldā*).¹⁹ Her eyes are jet black and languorous; cheeks have the colour of red apples; the belly is as soft as silk and as bright as silver. Sometimes she is likened to a garden in autumn by referring to the fruits of equinox (*mīwahā-yi mihrigān*).²⁰ her black hair is likened to clusters of grapes; her chin to an apple; her breasts to pomegranates, or lemons (*līmū*); eyes are almond-shaped; the face is as round as an orange; lines around the lips are likened to the jujub fruit; lips to the red pit of the pistachio nut. Her lips are as sweet and swollen as a fresh date. Her waist is always slender while her breasts are swelling and bursting from ripeness.

J. Khaleghi-Motlagh argues that the physical description of the

¹⁸ J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 255. For more information on the concept of the beloved see J. Scott Meisami, *ibid.*, pp. 248–51; J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Elr*, under Beloved; E. Yarshater, "The Theme of Wine and Wine-drinking and the concept of the Beloved in Early Persian Poetry" in *Studia Islamica*, 13, 1960, 45; *idem*, "Persian Poetry in the Timurid and Savaḡid Periods" in *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 4, pp. 972–75.

¹⁹ *Dīwān-i Nizāmī*, ed. S. Nafīsī, p. 259, l. 604.

²⁰ See descriptions presented in *Wīs and Rāmīn*, pp. 24, 28, 238.

beloved altered during Fakhr ad-Dīn Gurgānī's era and "Simplicity gave way to artificiality; the natural nature (*ṭabīʿat-i ṭabīʿī*) altered into an ornamented nature; more permeation of fantasy in the poetry and the emphasis of imagination over evidence."²¹ Khaleghi-Motlagh's thesis is disputable because the descriptions of the beloved in poets such as Firdausī and Daqīqī are no more natural than the description given by later poets. The shift Khaleghi-Motlagh has identified is not so much the "emphasis of imagination over evidence" but more precisely the disappearance of realism and the permeation of folkloristic themes in literature, especially romantic epic. From Gurgānī's time onwards, the beloved's description becomes unrealistic, to the point that she is portrayed as a beautiful young woman even in her old age. The agelessness of the beloved is a typical quality of folklore,²² and is true of Niẓāmī's Laylī. In Niẓāmī's other romance, *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, when Shīrūya slays his father Khusrau and woos his father's wife, Shīrīn, she must be old, but not according to her physical description.

In treatises on the theory of love, as in lyrics, the beloved is haughty, quarrelsome and aggressive as well as in lyrics. To depict the hostile nature of the beloved, poets employ hunting and military themes. Both the lover and the beloved can be the hunter and the prey. Initially the lover is usually the hunter, but when he attains the object of his chase, he finds himself to be the prey. At times the lover is a hawk and the beloved a partridge,²³ and sometimes the lover is a sparrow and the beloved is a falcon. Rapacious beasts, such as lions or wolves, and their victims such as gazelles and deer, are the most frequently recurring images in amatory texts.

Furthermore, the beloved's cruelty is accentuated by comparing various parts of her body to insects and creeping creatures. The beloved's long black hair is often compared to serpents that bite the lover.²⁴ The beloved's curly locks are likened to the crooked tail of

²¹ "Zībāʿī-yi kamāl-i maṭlūb-i zan dar farhang-i Irān" in *Irānshināsī*, no. 8, p. 710.

²² In connection to this aspect of the beloved, mention should also be made of Shahrū in Gurgānī's *Wīs and Rāmīn*, who despite her old age is not only very beautiful, she gives birth to Wīs. See Max Lüthi, *Das europäische Volksmärchen: Form und Wesen*, Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1992, pp. 20-1.

²³ See, for instance, *Khusrau u Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwatiyān, p. 501, l. 13.

²⁴ Using the poetic figure of *iltizām*, 'poetic obligation,' Niẓāmī compares Shīrīn's long black hair to serpents keeping watch over treasure in *Khusrau u Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwatiyān, pp. 191-92, ll. 50-53.

a deadly scorpion. Her fine hair is compared to the fine feet of an ant. The beloved's tresses may even be likened to a demon.²⁵ The young male beloved has a newly grown beard, like a swarm of ants gathered on a rose-petal, which will eventually destroy the beloved's fine face.²⁶

The beloved is often called a 'blood-drinker' (*khūn-khār*) because she feeds on the lover's blood. The paradox in hunting imagery lies in the lover's longing to be caught by such a bloodthirsty being, as in the following line by Nizāmī: "Reveal your face, because I crave to see my garden/ behold me because I crave for my blood-drinking narcissus."²⁷ The imagery of the beloved in association with blood is sometimes enhanced when the heartless beloved turns out to be a 'butcher' (*qaṣṣāb*) by profession.²⁸ To give only two examples, when the beloved breathes on the lover, the latter thinks that she has actually killed him and now wants to flay his skin.²⁹ At times, the lover beseeches the beloved not to sell him when he has killed him, as butchers usually do with the meat.³⁰

The military vocabulary portrays the striking appearance of the beloved as a skilful soldier. The beloved's curls form a lasso; her eyebrows a bow; her eyelashes sharp arrows wounding the lover's heart. Her eyelids are compared to the scabbard; her glances are as long lances crippling the fugitive lover; and her dimple is a pitfall. While the beloved is armed from head to toe, the helpless lover has no armour and is often surprised by the beloved's sudden nightly attacks. Sometimes the lover is the commander of an army and the beloved a soldier. In this kind of love relationship, the vocabulary of war and weaponry is usually employed and is strongly coloured with eroticism.

In classical Persian texts, where the ideal picture of female beauty is presented, the entire image is usually of a beauty belonging either to the inhabitants of Paradise, the *al-ḥūr al-ʿīn*, the gazelle-eyed

²⁵ Anwarī, *Dīwān*, Vol. 2, p. 843.

²⁶ See my article "Insects in Classical Persian Literature: the Case of the Ant" in *Persica*, No. 16, 1996-99, pp. 109-44.

²⁷ Nizāmī, *Dīwān-i qaṣā'id*, ed. S. Nafisī, p. 271, l. 783; 'Attār, *Dīwān*, p. 93.

²⁸ *Dīwān-i Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmān*, p. 651; also see J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, p. 7.

²⁹ See *Die schöne Mahsati: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des persischen Vierzeilers*, Band 1, Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1963, pp. 126-28.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 288, q. 176.

maidens promised to the believers in the Koran, or to the world of the *parī*, a Persian word that has entered English as 'fairy' and into French as *féé*.³¹ The *hūrīs* are mentioned in numerous places in the Koran, where the brief descriptions focus on their eyes, chastity and goodness.³² Elsewhere they are depicted as "hidden pearls," "spotless virgins, amorous, of like age," with "swelling breasts" and large black eyes.³³

The *parī* is a winged creature, belonging in the pre-Islamic period to the class of demons, but her image altered with the introduction of the new religion.³⁴ The stinking and diabolic creature found in Middle Persian writings metamorphosed into a beautiful and elegant woman whose loveliness stole the heart of any mortal man. To fall in love with this elegant creature is to be *parī-zada*, 'struck by a fairy,' a common fate in epics.³⁵ The interesting point is that the experience of falling in love becomes secondary to the *parī*'s 'enchantment' (*afsun*). Love is experienced as a magical or even a demonical force. The enchanted person starts a search for the enchanter, who alone can undo the spell.

Since the *parīs* originally belonged to the class of demons (*dēwās*), the term *dīwāna*, literally 'demoniac' is also used to describe the 'love-struck' person. As we shall see, Majnūn is frequently described as a *dīw*, *dīwāna* or *parī-zada*, and Laylī as a *parī*. As Theodor Nöldeke has pointed out, this Iranian linking of love with 'demoniac' was imported into the Arab world, where the Arabic word *jinn*, the equivalent of the Persian *parī*, came to function in the same way; those who had fallen in love with such a creature were called *majnūn*, 'possessed by a jinn'.³⁶ There are many instances of being enchanted by

³¹ See J.T.P. de Bruijn in *EI*, under *Parī* in Persian; see also Bahman Sarkāratī, "Parī: taḥqīqī dar ḥāshīya-yi ūstūra-shināsī-yi taṭbīqī" in the *Nashriya-yi dānishkada*, Tabriz: 1350, Nos. 97-100, pp. 1-32, who gives an etymology of the word and its use in Zoroastrian and Middle Persian texts. See also A.D.H. Bivar, "A Persian Fairyland" in *Acta Iranica*. Deuxième Série, 1985, Vol. 10 (24), pp. 25-42, and A. Christensen, *Essai Sur la Démonologie Iranienne*, København: Enjar Munksgaard, 1941, pp. 60-71; see also my article "Magic in Classical Persian Amatory Literature" in *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1, Winter 1999, pp. 71-97.

³² The Koran: 44:54; 52:20; 55:70,72; 56:22-3.

³³ A.J. Wensinck & Ch. Pellat, in *EI*, under *Hūr*.

³⁴ The Persian verb *parīdan*, 'to fly' also derives from *parī*.

³⁵ Other synonyms of *parī-zada* such as *parī-girifta*, 'seized by a fairy,' *parī-dīda*, 'seen by a fairy,' *parī-khānda*, 'summoned by a fairy,' etc. occur frequently in classical Persian poetry.

³⁶ Th. Nöldeke, *Arabs*, p. 670. In pre-Islamic Arab poetry, the beloved's altering states are compared to a *ghūl*, 'ghoul,' which continually takes on new forms.

a *parī* or a demonological power in Persian poetry. In Gurgānī's *Wīs and Rāmīn*, love is closely connected to magic and *parīs*.³⁷ In Firdausī's romantic account of the love between Bīzhan and Manīzha, love is related to the *parī* and *jādū*, 'magician'.³⁸ Nizāmī refers to the concepts of 'demoniac' and '*parī*-struck' in several places in his romances.³⁹ In *Khusrau and Shīrīn* (88:73), Khusrau is described as a demoniac: "When the king saw the brilliance of his new sweet-heart/you would say that the 'demoniac' (*dīw-dīda*) had seen the new moon."⁴⁰ The way Shīrīn falls in love with Khusrau is related to demons as well. In the first scene in which Shāpūr shows Khusrau's portrait to Shīrīn, she becomes so infatuated with it that her attendants fear that the young princess may lose her heart. Therefore, they secretly tear the portrait and leave the place.⁴¹ In this scene, Shīrīn is described as a *parī* and when she finally falls in love with Khusrau, the location is characterised as the dwelling of demons and Shīrīn as a demoniac.⁴²

The beloved is usually associated with a demonic lineage and she is described using magical terminology. The image of Laylī as a magic force (*sihr*) that has bewitched Majnūn occurs in al-Wālibī's *Dīwān*.⁴³ Nizāmī repeatedly compares Laylī to a *parī* and *jādū*. The earliest reference to *jādū* occurs in chapter 15:29: "Your conjuring eyes (*jādū chashm*) deprived me of sleep." In chapter 24:13 there is another reference to Laylī's conjuring eyes: "Through the magic that she had in her glance/she seized a hundred empires with half a

See, for instance, the *qaṣīda* by Ka'b b. Zuhayr translated in M.A. Sells, *Early Islamic . . .*, pp. 64-71. In al-Wālibī's *Dīwān*, there are several references to Laylī's demonic and magical power. See A.E. Khairallah's analysis in *Love, Madness*, pp. 90, 47. For the concept of jinn in Persian literature see M. Omidshah in *ELr*, under Genie.

³⁷ See *Wīs u Rāmīn*, p. 257, ll. 66-7. In the anonymous Alexander romance, as soon as Alexander sees Arāqīt, the queen of the fairies, strength leaves his limbs and he becomes "motionless like a picture"; he becomes infatuated with her. See M. Southgate, *Iskandarnamah: a Persian Medieval Alexander Romance*, New York: 1978, p. 79.

³⁸ *Shāh-nāma*, Vol. 3, pp. 317-18.

³⁹ For a study of love and magic in Nizāmī's romances, see my article "Magic in Classical Persian Amatory Literature," pp. 77-83.

⁴⁰ This phrase, which is used several times in the poem, has become an expression in Persian and means that the full moon increases man's madness.

⁴¹ *Khusrau u Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwatīyān, pp. 158-59, ll. 37-9.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 164, l. 18: "In that spring in which the demons dwelled/look at the *parī* how she has been possessed by a demon."

⁴³ A.E. Khairallah, *Love, Madness*, pp. 74-5.

wink." Moreover, Laylī's eyes are compared to those of a gazelle.⁴⁴ This comparison and the fact that the beloved is often depicted as a *parī*, who usually changes her form into a beautiful gazelle, links the eyes of the beloved to the world of magical beings. As has been said, the beloved appears initially as a prey but then turns into a hunter, hunting the lover. In chapter 46:31, an old man describes Laylī as a mysterious gazelle, which can cast even a lion into deep sleep.⁴⁵ In the same chapter (l. 36), the old man says of Laylī: "She has the disposition of a conjurer in robbing the hearts." In chapter 24:16, the emphasis is on Laylī's hunting eyes: "With her gazelle-eyes, anointed with musk/she hunted the very musk-bag of the musk-deer."⁴⁶

Laylī is repeatedly associated with a *parī*. In chapter 16:15 and chapter 24:14, she is directly compared to a *parī*: "How can it be said, Laylī was *parī*-faced," "She persisted between water and fire/so that you would say, this *parī*-faced one was a *parī*." Again in chapter 57:17, Laylī is portrayed as a *parī* fettered in the bonds of marriage: "In his (i.e. her husband's) companionship the idol who was born of *parīs*/was in the bonds of steel like a *parī*." Here Nizāmī alludes to the way *parīs* could be captured. In the anonymous Alexander romance, it is reported that once a fairy is caught and is manacled by iron fetters, she cannot free herself.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ This aspect of the beloved in Arabic literature is investigated by J.C. Bürgel, "The Lady Gazelle and her Murderous Glances," in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 1989, pp. 1-11.

⁴⁵ "A gazelle-eyed one whose mysterious eyes/carried the lion into a state of rabbit's sleep." For an analysis of this line see Abbas Daneshwari, "Symbolism of the Rabbit in the Manuscript of Warqa wa Gulshah" in *Essays in Islamic Art and Architecture in Honor of Katharina Otto-Dorn*, ed. A. Daneshwari, Malibu: Undena Publications, 1981, pp. 21-3.

⁴⁶ There are many references to Laylī as a source of magic. See, for instance, chapter 46:36, in which Laylī's nature is compared to a *jādū*: "She had a conjuring disposition in robbing the hearts."

⁴⁷ M. Southgate, *Iskandarnamah*, p. 89. Other references to Laylī as a *parī* occur in chapter 38:8, in which Majnūn complains to Zephyr: "He headed towards the land of that *parī*-faced/he was grown lean like a lock of hair because of moaning." When Ibn Salām in chapter 26:14 prepares himself to send a messenger to ask Laylī's hand, the narrator depicts Laylī as a *parī-zād*, 'born of a fairy': "He looked for a solution and sent someone/to arrange a marriage with that fairy-born." In chapter 54:19, in which the reason for Majnūn's abstinence from sexual intercourse with Laylī is described, Laylī is again identified as a *parī-zād*: "Majnūn did not gratify his desire through that *parī-zād*/so that the mansion of love remained thriving." In chapter 29:79, in which Naufal fights against Laylī's tribe, he refers to Majnūn as *parī-zada* and Laylī as a *parī-nishān*: "For the sake of a *parī*-stricken young man/I

Laylī's comparison to the *parī* is ambiguous since it can be read as attributing Majnūn's enchantment to magic, or as simply referring to Laylī's exceptional beauty. As early as the tenth century, the female beloved is compared to a *parī* in lyrical poetry. The beloved's magical glances, her enticing and coquettish acts and her fragrant scent are all prerequisite aspects explaining how the beloved puts a spell on the lover. In Persian love poetry, magical terminology is inherently related to the beloved's physical beauty.

By describing Laylī as a *parī* and by demonstrating how this fairy-like beloved enchants Majnūn, Niẓāmī added a mystical dimension to the relationship between Majnūn and Laylī. Mystics commonly used the vocabulary of magic to describe the experience of falling in love with the heavenly Beloved. They often speak of love as an 'incantation' or 'enchantment' (*afṣūn*), a 'talisman' (*ṭilism*), 'magic' (*siḥr*), and 'conjury' (*jādū*). The Beloved is a fairy *par excellence*.

Niẓāmī also compares Laylī to Paradise and *al-ḥūr al-ʿayn*, maidens with gazelle-like eyes, while Majnūn is described as a person who is longing to attain this paradisiacal being. By presenting a perfect picture of Laylī, Niẓāmī explains why Majnūn is captivated by Laylī's beauty. In his answer to Salām of Baghdād in chapter 63:33, Majnūn states: "Laylī's portal is the doorway to Paradise." In Niẓāmī's poem, Laylī is not merely compared to Paradise, but she is the very Paradise itself. She is often likened to a cypress, a symbol for eternity. In chapter 48:18, she is compared to the garden of Iram.

Majnūn refers to Laylī's beauty by using floral vocabulary.⁴⁸ He compares his relationship to his beloved to the relationship between a gardener and a garden in several places. Examples of this floral description occur in chapters 38 and 62. In chapter 38, Majnūn sings:

In your garden, my youth passed by,
O, for all my work in the garden.
This ring-dove suffered in the garden;
when the fruits became ripe, the raven ate them.
(ll. 20-1)

want from you a *parī*-form person." In chapter 63:37, Majnūn takes Salām of Baghdād to the tomb of Laylī and says: "This is my beloved, who has the signs of a *parī*/this is the very perdition of my life."

⁴⁸ For a discussion on the floral qualities of the beloved see J. Scott Meisami, "The Body as Garden: Nature and Sexuality in Persian Poetry" in *Edebiyât*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1995, pp. 245-74.

Nizāmī emphasises Laylī's attractiveness in numerous places, but because of the metaphorical nature of the descriptions we have no realistic picture of her. In addition to the references mentioned above, there are three extended descriptions of her physical perfection.⁴⁹ The first appears in chapter thirteen:

A gazelle-eyed beauty that killed
 a world with one amorous gesture.
 She was the Arabian moon in revealing her countenance;
 she was a Persian beauty in robbing the hearts.
 Her locks were like night and her countenance like a garden
 or a torch in the claws of a [black] raven.
 With a small mouth and a long shadow,
 a concentrated substance like a bowl of sugar. (. . .)
 She was the veiled person in the house of life;
 She was the king couplet of the ode of youth. (. . .)
 In each heart, there was an inclination towards passion for her;
 her tresses were like night (*layl*) and her name was Laylī.
 (ll. 59–62, 65, 69)

The second extended description is in chapter 24, where her maturity is emphasised. Once again we get no realistic picture, but rather a reflection of an ideal beauty in Paradise. Here, in addition to the floral terminology, Laylī is depicted with hunting imagery. Laylī's long and curly locks are likened to a lasso, her eyelashes to arrows; her dimple is a deep pit dug in the path of the lover who desires to steal a kiss from the beloved's lips:

The summa of the beauty of the seven circles;
 the stipendiary of the seven lords [who govern the seven spheres].
 The envy of the face of the Moon in the sky,
 the grief of the heart of the cypress in the orchard. (. . .)
 Her fresh rose holding a cup in its hand;
 sprang out of the bud of freshness.
 Her erect cypress grew taller;
 her ruby dates became riper.
 She was growing in the garden of delightfulness;
 she melted people with her coquettish acts. (. . .)
 No prey could escape her lasso;
 her amorous glance catches them and her tresses tie them. (. . .)
 Her tresses swept the road of those who desired a kiss;

⁴⁹ Only the first two extended descriptions are considered here; the third can be found in chapter 46:28–36.

her lashes were saying: "May God bestow it upon you." (. . .)
 In the pit of her dimple, which was uncovered,
 a hundred hearts had fallen by mistake.
 Her forelock had thrown a rope on the road
 to pull out of the pit those who might fall in it.
 (ll. 2-3, 10-2, 15, 25-7)

Nizāmī portrays a perfect picture of Laylī, which links up closely with the ideals of female beauty in Persian romances. In Nizāmī's skilled hands, Majnūn as a Persian aristocrat is enchanted by the love of a girl who is perfect in every respect. As a charming fairy, Laylī puts a spell on Majnūn and disappears behind the curtains of tribal laws. Her disappearance causes the bewitched Majnūn to start a perpetual quest after his enchanter. By placing Laylī behind the curtains, Nizāmī preserves the image of Laylī maintained among mystics. In Sufi literature, the beauty of Laylī is a seed placed in a trap to capture the lover.⁵⁰

3. *Religious vocabulary describing the lovers' relationship*

Nizāmī uses religious vocabulary to describe the relationship between Laylī and Majnūn. Part of this vocabulary is connected to the Ka'ba, to the direction of the Ka'ba (*qibla*) indicated by the prayer niche (*mihrāb*); to the stations of the pilgrimage (*maqāmāt*), to the circumambulation (*tawāf*) of the Ka'ba; to the sacred garb (*iḥrām*) put on by a pilgrim, and finally to *labbayk*, the famous chanting of pilgrims. A.L.F.A. Beelaert has investigated the image of the Ka'ba as a bride in the works of Khāqānī and several other poets including Nizāmī. Her approach is, however, limited to the feminine aspect of the Ka'ba and she deals with only one example from Nizāmī's works.⁵¹

⁵⁰ See, for instance, 'Ayn al-Qudāt's *Tamhīdāt*, pp. 104-05: "My dear, conceive of Laylī's beauty as a seed put in a trap; what do you think that this lure is? When the Hunter of pre-eternity (*azal*) determined to make a steed for love from the nature of Majnūn, it became clear that Majnūn had not the aptitude to fall into the trap of the Beauty of the pre-eternity's Love (. . .)."

⁵¹ A.L.F.A. Beelaert, *A Cure for the Grieving*, pp. 143-59. Nizāmī compares the Ka'ba to the beloved in one of his *qaṣīdas*. He compares the black stone (*al-ḥajar al-aswad*) to the beloved's black beauty spot and its curved door-knocker to the beloved's curly locks. The Ka'ba is always veiled, like a marriageable girl. See *Dīwān-i Nizāmī*, ed. S. Nafīsī, pp. 232-34, ll. 199-232.

Richard Gramlich deals particularly with the Sufi view of the Ka'ba.⁵²

The theme of the Ka'ba in Islamic amatory poetry becomes increasingly popular from the eleventh century. In Islamic literature, the relationship of a pilgrim to the Ka'ba is often treated as the relationship between a lover and his beloved. Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn al-Qārī' as-Sarrāj (417–500/1027–1106), a Hanbalite traditionalist from Baghdad, devotes a chapter to the lovers of the Ka'ba in his *Maṣānī' al-'ushshāq* (*Lovers Who Were Slain by Love*). This book describes the calamities of an unattainable love.⁵³ Medieval Persian poets often admonished their readers not to worship the physical Ka'ba but rather to concentrate on its spiritual aspect. The theme of choosing between two Ka'bas has become a *topos* in Persian literature. Nizāmī, along with many other poets, severely censures praying in two directions. The implications of the two types of Ka'ba are often used either positively, to test the sincerity of the lover, or negatively to condemn *shirk*, 'attribution of a partner to God.' In his *Kīmiyā*, Muḥammad Ghazālī makes a sharp contrast between those people who undertake an outward journey and those who travel inwardly. The former, in his view, desire only to see the "outward of the Ka'ba" while the latter remain at home and it is the "Ka'ba that comes to them, and walks around them, telling her secrets to them."⁵⁴ In accordance with such ideas, mystics walked around themselves instead of going to Mecca. In *Risāla-yi parda-yi ḥijāb* attributed to 'Abdullāh Anṣārī, he shows the elevated position of the heart in contrast to the formal Ka'ba by condemning insincere mystics who claimed to have walked on water or those who claimed to have journeyed to heaven:

If you can fly in the air, then you are like a fly, and if you can walk on the water, then you are like a straw. Win a heart so that you be someone:

In the Path of God, two Ka'bas can be attained:

⁵² R. Gramlich, *Die Shīitischen Derwischorden*, Vol. 2, pp. 119–23.

⁵³ See J.C. Vadet, *L'esprit courtois*, chapter 9; also consult S. Leder in *EL*, under as-Sarrāj.

⁵⁴ *Kīmiyā*, Vol. 1, pp. 456–57. Ghazālī relates the following saying of Abū Sa'īd to these two classes of people: "While people blister their feet [to reach the Ka'ba], many people reached [it] without any blister," *tā mardumān pāy ābila kunand, mardān bī ābila rasīdand*. In his *Kashf al-mahjūb*, in the chapter "On Ḥajj," Hujwīrī makes a distinction between the formal and the spiritual Ka'ba. See *Kashf al-mahjūb*, pp. 422–27; see also Rūmī, *Dīwān-i kabīr*, Vol. 6, gh. 3104, pp. 298–99.

One is the formal Ka'ba and the other is the Ka'ba of the heart.
Visit the heart as much as you can
Because a single heart is more than a thousand Ka'bas.⁵⁵

'Ayn al-Qudāt repeatedly advises his audience to worship the Ka'ba of their hearts (*ka'ba-yi dil*) and to leave the house of clay (*ka'ba-yi gil*). He tells the following story to explain this subtle point:

Haven't you heard that when Bāyazīd of Bisṭām was travelling he met a person and asked him: "Where are you going?" The person said: "I am going to the House of God Almighty." Bāyazīd said: "How much money do you have?" The person answered: "I have seven drachma." Bāyazīd said: "Give them to me and walk around me seven times, because then you have visited the Ka'ba."⁵⁶

'Ayn al-Qudāt concludes: "whoever goes to the *Ka'ba-yi gil*, will see himself, and whoever goes to the *Ka'ba-yi dil*, will see God." He goes on to say that "when man's body (*qālib*) was not yet created and the Ka'ba did not exist, the souls visited the Ka'ba."⁵⁷

Moreover, to choose the heart instead of the Ka'ba is taken as a clear sign of fidelity. 'Aṭṭār tells the following account about Shiblī which shows the aversion of the sincere mystic to the formal religion:

It is reported that when people saw him (Shiblī) running, with fire in his hand, they asked him: "Where are you heading to?" He answered: "I am going to set fire to the Ka'ba so that people occupy themselves with the Owner of the House."⁵⁸

In another report related by 'Aṭṭār we see the Ka'ba as a graceful walking creature going to meet the mystic woman Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya:

⁵⁵ *Risāla-yi parda-yi hijāb*, p. 66; in another place Anṣārī says: "The utterance of lovers, 'here I am for you' (*labbayk*) is better than the sacred garb of the pilgrim (*ihrām*) because the former is directed at the Friend while the latter to the Ka'ba // why should I go to the Ka'ba? Why should I cut my way short in the desert? / The friend's alley is the Ka'ba and the direction of prayer is her face." p. 93. In his *Muṣibat-nāma*, 'Aṭṭār tells a story about an Indian, who learns that making a pilgrimage to the Ka'ba can free him from eternal punishment. He immediately goes to the Ka'ba. When he sees the house is empty of its Owner, he remarks in astonishment: "Where is the Owner, for I do not see Him anywhere." When another pilgrim hears this, he says: "The House is His, but He is not in the House; everyone who is not insane knows this." See 'Aṭṭār, *Muṣibat-nāma*, pp. 197-98.

⁵⁶ *Tamhūdāt*, p. 94. There are several stories told about Bāyazīd and his pilgrimage to Mecca. See Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 134; Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, Vol. 2, pp. 102-03, ll. 2224-2257; *Maqālāt-i Shams*, pp. 121, 127. For Rūmī's view on the Ka'ba see A. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, pp. 291-93.

⁵⁷ *Tamhūdāt*, p. 95, l. 9.

⁵⁸ *Tadhkirat al-auliya*, p. 538.

It is reported that when Rābi'a set out for Mecca, she saw the Ka'ba coming to meet her. Rābi'a said: "I crave for the Owner of the House. What should I do with the House. I crave for 'whoever approaches me by a hand's span, I will approach him by an arm's span.' Why should I look at the Ka'ba. I cannot have the Ka'ba, why should I be happy with the beauty of it."⁵⁹

Apart from using these reports to emphasise the mystical aspect of the Ka'ba, 'Aṭṭār narrates a number of anecdotes about the journey of Majnūn to the Ka'ba and Majnūn's preference for the Ka'ba of his heart.⁶⁰

The best example showing the difference between the formal and the spiritual Ka'ba is offered in *Sharḥ at-ta'arruf*, in which Mustamlī Bukhārī cites 'Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Sa'dān: "One day, I sat at the door of the Ka'ba and I heard a lament from inside the House saying: 'O wall, be removed from the path of My friends. Anyone who visits Me by way of you (i.e. the wall), will walk around you, and anyone who visits Me by way of Myself, will walk around Myself.'"⁶¹

Having briefly surveyed the theme of the Ka'ba in Persian mystical literature, I shall deal with Nizāmī's description of Majnūn as a pilgrim and Laylī as the object of his pilgrimage. As early as chapter nineteen, in which Majnūn is brought to the Ka'ba by his father, he takes the Ka'ba as Laylī. On seeing the Ka'ba's curved door-knocker, he mistakes it for Laylī's curly lock and clasps it firmly.⁶² The reason for the journey is to heal Majnūn's love-sickness by praying to God. In Nizāmī's account, Laylī's father advises Majnūn's father to pray for Majnūn so that he may be healed and can marry Laylī. After consulting with his relatives, Majnūn's father decides to

⁵⁹ *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 67. For a full translation of 'Aṭṭār's account on Rābi'a see Paul Losensky and M. Sells, "Rābi'a: Her Words and Life in 'Aṭṭār's Memorial of the Friends of God" in *Early Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 155-70. See also M. Smith, *Rābi'a the Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam*, Cambridge: At the University Press, 1928, pp. 8-9. In *Mantiq al-tayr*, (p. 100) and in *Muṣibat-nāma*, (p. 198), 'Aṭṭār tells another story about Rābi'a and the Ka'ba. 'Aṭṭār even presents the Ka'ba as a rival of man in the following story in *Muṣibat-nāma* (p. 199). Shaykh Naṣrābādī was in the vicinity of the Ka'ba when the wind removed the cloth from the Ka'ba. The mystic takes this as a gesture showing the Ka'ba's pride and says to it: "If the Beloved called you once: 'my house'//He has called me seventy times: "O my servant."

⁶⁰ See *Muṣibat-nāma*, pp. 198-99, 275-76.

⁶¹ *Sharḥ at-ta'arruf*, Vol. 4, p. 1802.

⁶² See *supra*, chapter 4:2, p. 82.

take his son to the Ka'ba. Although several romances contain such a journey as a means for the lover to forget the beloved, this is not the case in Nizāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn*.⁶³ Both in Nizāmī's version and in earlier stories, the purpose of Majnūn's journey to the Ka'ba is to ask God to heal his love-sickness.⁶⁴ When Majnūn and his father arrive at the holy site, Majnūn's father asks him to pray to God to remove Laylī's love from his heart. However, as soon as Majnūn hears the word love, he first bursts into tears and then starts to laugh. Afterwards, he holds the Ka'ba's door-knocker and begs God to increase Laylī's love in him:

He was saying while he held the Ka'ba's door-knocker to his breast:
 "Today I am like a door-knocker on the door.
 In the circle of love, I sell my soul;
 may my ear not be without the ring of love.
 People tell me to detach myself from love;
 this is not the way of friendship.
 I feed upon love,
 if love perishes, I will die too. (. . .)
 O Lord, by the Lordship of your Lordliness
 and the perfection of your kingship
 Bring me through love to such an extreme
 that love remains, although I will not remain.
 From the fount of love, give me light;
 do not put away this collyrium from my eyes.
 Although I am drunk with the wine of love,
 make me more in love than I already am. (. . .)
 O Lord, give me each instant more
 inclination towards Laylī's face.
 Whatever time may remain of my life
 take it and add it to Laylī's life.
 Although I have become as thin as a lock of hair through suffering,
 I do not want a lock of hair to be removed from her head.
 Although I am burning like a candle with pain for her,
 I do not wish that my days should be without her pain."
 (ll. 25-8, 31-4, 36-9)

Majnūn's prayer is not only a sincere outburst of love, but also a response to his father who had advised him to abandon love. In this

⁶³ Among the romances in which the lover makes a journey to forget the beloved is Bāfiqī's *Nāzīr and Manzūr* (*Regarder and Regarded*). In *Warqa and Gulshāh*, Warqa's journey is not to forget, but to earn money so that he can marry Gulshāh.

⁶⁴ See, for instance, 'Aṭṭār's *Muṣibat-nāma*, pp. 275-76; see also Gāzurgāhī, *Maḡālīs al-'ushshāq*, pp. 278-79.

scene, seeing the Ka'ba as a beloved, Majnūn is reminded of Laylī and tries to display his devotion towards her. The mystic 'Azīz Nasafī had said that the "lover should remember the beloved, he must stay at the beloved's alley, and must consider the beloved's house as his Ka'ba, and he must walk around the beloved's house."⁶⁵ In addition, to pray at the Ka'ba while holding the Ka'ba's covering or door-knocker was an 'Udhrite tradition. The 'Udhrite lovers prayed to God at this holy site to increase their love for their beloved. Majnūn's prayer is a token of loving obedience.⁶⁶ Since Majnūn stands for an ideal lover, it would have been strange if he had been able to pray to God to release him from the pangs of love.

The relationship between Majnūn and Laylī is analogous to the tragic love relationship between Iblīs, the archetype of a mystic lover, and God, as reported by Sufis such as Ḥallāj, Ghazālī brothers, Sanā'ī, 'Aṭṭār, 'Ayn al-Qudāt, and Rūzbihān Baqlī.⁶⁷ The story is that God, having created Man, orders the angels to bow before him, but Iblīs refuses to bow before anyone but God, and so is expelled from heaven. Majnūn and Iblīs are mystics who are eternally loyal to the beloved and are immersed in the contemplation of the One Beloved. Like Iblīs, Majnūn prefers suffering, separation and affliction to praying in two directions. Both are exaggerated monotheists and loyal 'to a fault'; it is indeed because of this exaggeration and excessive devotion to a single beloved that some readers take Majnūn to be insane, and Iblīs has been said to be more monotheistic than God. In the same way that Iblīs takes God's command to prostrate himself before Adam as a test, rather than something he should actually obey, so Majnūn disregards his father's order and prays that his love may increase. Majnūn's disobedient prayer cannot be merely as a sign of insanity: it should be interpreted within the Sufi context. His prayer is a public vow, a formal affirmation of his love for Laylī. Like Iblīs, who at the expense of self-destruction prayed in only one direction, Majnūn too fixes his eyes on Laylī without thinking of the consequences. Finally, both Majnūn and Iblīs become the target of blame.

In addition to the scene described above, other terminology con-

⁶⁵ *Kūtāb al-insān al-kāmil*, p. 115.

⁶⁶ This point is dealt with by H. Ritter, *Das Meer*, p. 373.

⁶⁷ For a study of the relationship between Iblīs and God see P.J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy*, chapter three, pp. 122-83.

cerning the Ka'ba occurs in chapter 24:5, in which Majnūn compares Laylī to the niche in a mosque which indicates the direction to the Ka'ba (*miḥrāb*).⁶⁸ She is "the prayer-niche (*miḥrāb*) of idol-worshippers." In chapter 48:14, Majnūn says: "The beauty of your face is my Ka'ba/my niche (*miḥrāb*) is the entrance your alley." Even after Laylī's death, at the end of the story she remains Majnūn's direction of prayer (*qibla*): "At one time he makes his direction of prayer (*qibla*) the direction of his beloved's grave/at another he seeks the grave/onager on the plain."⁶⁹

The image of Majnūn as a pilgrim is maintained throughout the story. In chapter 16:4, when Majnūn comes to Laylī, he chants the invocation used by pilgrims, the famous 'waiting for orders' (*talbiya*) prayer: "He came to his native land while seeking the beloved/singing poetry and shouting: "Here I am for you" (*labbayk*)."⁷⁰ Again in chapter 52:18-9, Majnūn is depicted as a pilgrim running everywhere calling Laylī's name, an allusion to the pilgrimage ritual of running between *Ṣafā* and *Marwah*, which is also a reminiscent of Judgement Day:

He is shouting cries like a crier (*munāḍī*)
and wandering in the midst of the valley.
Saying Laylī at every second step,
looking for Laylī at each station (*maqām*).

As a pilgrim, Majnūn performs the circumambulation ritual (*ṭawāf*) around Laylī, her tent, or her alley. In chapter 15:11, Majnūn goes with his friends to Laylī's house to worship her: "With those two or three friends, he went at dawn to circle around (*ṭawāf*) the alley of that idol."⁷¹

Another word relating to the pilgrimage is 'the sacred garb of a pilgrim' (*iḥrām*). In chapter 17:10, Majnūn is portrayed as a devoted

⁶⁸ For more information on the religious terminology see A.J. Wensinck and J. Jomier, in *EL*, under Ḥaḍḡḡ, sub-entry "III Islamic Ḥaḍḡḡ" and under Ka'ba.

⁶⁹ Chapter 62:104. The hunting of the onager, on horseback across the open plains of Iran, is the archetypal activity of the heroes of Persian epics. The word *gūr* is ambiguous, meaning 'grave' and 'onager.' Nizāmī often makes a pun on this word.

⁷⁰ This means: "waiting for your commands."

⁷¹ Other references to Majnūn as a pilgrim occur in chapter 29:38. Here, during the battle against Laylī's tribe, Majnūn is portrayed as a pilgrim: "He circles around (*ṭawāf*) like lovers/desiring to make peace from war." In chapter 62:82, Majnūn speaks to Laylī while weeping upon her grave: "As long as I circle around (*ṭawāf*) your cradle/I do not forsake your fidelity and oath."

pilgrim who tears his garment and becomes the target of blame (*malāmat*). In mysticism, rending one's pilgrim's garb is a symbol of divesting oneself of worldly qualities: "He has rent his pilgrim garb (*iḥrām*)/and fallen in the alley of blame."

In chapter 62:41, Majnūn refers to Laylī's grave with great reverence as a *turbat*, a word used to describe holy tombs: "When he saw the beauty of the grave (*turbat*) from a distance/he fell like a shadow from light."

The imitators of Niẓāmī, such as Amīr Khusrau, Jāmī, Hātifi, and Maktabī have used the same religious imagery to delineate Laylī and Majnūn's relationship. Here for brevity's sake, I only refer to Jāmī's and Maktabī's versions. Maktabī puts Majnūn in a quandary, compelling him to choose between two Ka'bas. On their way to Mecca, when the caravan of Majnūn's father comes near to Laylī's encampment, Majnūn shouts: "(...) this is my Ka'ba/this ground is the place of the desire of my life."⁷² When they arrive at the Ka'ba, Majnūn's father tells him to clasp the coil (door-knocker) of the Ka'ba's lock (*ḥalqa-yi zulf-i Ka'ba*). Majnūn holds the door-knocker but does not direct his face towards the Ka'ba; rather he fixes his eyes in the direction of Laylī's house, while asking God to increase the love for Laylī in his heart. In Jāmī's version, the Ka'ba theme is given a totally different treatment. Majnūn swears an oath to God that if he meets Laylī, he will undertake a pilgrimage to Mecca. After finally meeting Laylī, Majnūn asks her permission to depart for Mecca. In spite of Laylī's insistence that "You are my pilgrim and I am your pilgrim," Majnūn leaves her to fulfil his promise. When he arrives at Mecca and sees the beauty of the Ka'ba, he is reminded of Laylī's beauty. As in Niẓāmī's poem, in Jāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn*, Majnūn asks God to increase his love for Laylī and to strip him of everything except Laylī.⁷³

4. *Laylī as the mirror of the universe*

The description of the lovers' relationship is not confined to the religious terminology outlined above. In chapter 46:32–3, Niẓāmī enters

⁷² Maktabī Shīrāzī, *Laylī u Majnūn*, ed. M.J. Moīnfār, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1968, pp. 54–5.

⁷³ For this passage see Jāmī's *Laylī u Majnūn*, in *Mathnawī-yi ḥafī aurang*, pp. 794–97.

the realm of mysticism when he puts the following description of Laylī into the mouth of an old messenger:

Her black curl was like a *jīm*.

her stature like an *alif*, her mouth like a *mīm*.

This means that since my (Laylī's) letters correspond to a cup (*jām*), my name turned into the cup of Jamshīd (*jām-i jahān-namāy*).

The letter *jīm* has a double curve, the *alif* is an upright stroke, and the *mīm* is a small round circle. Having transformed Laylī into a cup, he ingeniously compares her to the *jām-i Jam*, the legendary world-reflecting cup of the mythic king Jamshīd, which has been taken by mystics to represent the heart of the Perfect Man, the Logos, the Mirror of the Universe.⁷⁴

In addition, the numerical values of these letters reveal the uniqueness of Laylī.⁷⁵ Being the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, *alif* is often taken as the first letter God wrote on the Well-Preserved Tablet. *Alif*'s numerical value is one, which agrees with one of the names of God, *Aḥad*, the One. The numerical value of the letter *mīm* is forty and it represents the complete circle of the hierarchy of beings.⁷⁶ Moreover, the letter is also often related the famous tradition in which God says: "I am Aḥmad without *mīm*," i.e. *Aḥad*, 'the One.'

In his *Sharaf-nāma*, Niẓāmī equates the *jām-i Jam* with a mirror. When the victorious Alexander eagerly asks people for the *jām-i Jam*, they answer him that there is no difference between Alexander's mirror and the Persian king's *jām*. It may be added here that in Persia, Alexander is regarded as the inventor of the mirror. Niẓāmī links the mirror to the heart of an ascetic in the *Sharaf-nāma*, in the section

⁷⁴ The earliest recorded reference to this cup in New Persian occurs in Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma*, in the romance of *Bizhan and Manizha*. For the significance of *jām-i Jam* see Muḥammad Mu'īn, *Mazdayasnā wa ta'thīr ān dar adabiyāt-i Fārsī*, Tehran: Kayhānak, 1326, pp. 532-36; idem, *Majmū'a-yi maqālāt*, Vol. 1, pp. 345-66; for the association of *jām-i Jam* with Alexander's mirror see Pūrjāwādī, "Schönheit und Anmut, ein Diskussionsbeitrag zur Hafisschen Ästhetik" in *Spektrum Iran*, Jahrgang 1, 1988, Heft 4, pp. 28-9; also M. Murtaḍawī, *Maktab-i Ḥāfiẓ*, pp. 159-235. Among the mystical texts describing the *jām-i Jam* are Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī's "Lughat-i mūrān" in *Oeuvres Philosophiques*, Vol. 3, pp. 298-99, and 'Aṭṭār's *Ilāhī-nāma*, pp. 184-86.

⁷⁵ For the use of letter symbolism in Persian literature see A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 411-25.

⁷⁶ For an elaborate description of this letter see Lāhijī, *Maḥāṭṭah al-iḥjāz fī sharḥ-i gulshan-i rāz*, ed. M.R. Barzigar Khāliqī and I. Karbāsī, Tehran: Jiddiyat, 1374, pp. 21-2.

in which Alexander goes to a mountain to visit a reclusive ascetic. The latter recognises Alexander without having been introduced to him. The astounded Alexander asks the man how he could possibly know who he is, upon which the ascetic answers by alluding to the myth of Alexander as the inventor of the mirror.⁷⁷

You are not the only one with a mirror in your hand,
there is a mirror in my heart as well.
After hundreds of years, mortification has cleaned its rust,
can it not show a face to me after all?

Laylī's association with the mirror has a mystical significance. In mystical love poetry, the mirror is the heart of the lover, which has been polished by mortification, suffering and spiritual aspiration. Mystics often use the holy tradition: "heaven and earth contain Me not, but the heart of my faithful servant contains Me" to elucidate how the Beloved can be seen in the mirror of the heart. Love itself is also likened to a limpid mirror in which everything can be seen. In the *Sawānīh*, Aḥmad Ghazālī observes that the mirror of love is essential for the beloved to admire her own majestic beauty. In fact, the beloved cannot perceive the perfection of her own beauty except in the mirror of the lover's love. Ghazālī adds that this is the reason why beauty requires a lover, so that the beloved can see herself through the mirror of the lover's love. The beloved feeds both on the lover's longing and her own loveliness, perceived through this love.⁷⁸

Laylī can be taken as Majnūn's heart, through which he sees the whole universe. In other words, wherever he looks, Majnūn finds Laylī's images: the entire universe is summarised in her. Nizāmī's comparison can be interpreted as Majnūn's idealisation of Laylī, who is repeatedly described by Majnūn as his heart, the essence of his soul, and the light of his life.

⁷⁷ Nizāmī tells the story of Alexander and his invention of the steel mirror in the *Sharaf-nāma*, W. Dastgirdī, pp. 150–53. For a history of Alexander's mirror (*āyina-yi Iskandārī*) see M. Mu'in, *Majmū'a-yi maqālāt*, Vol. 2, pp. 465–94.

⁷⁸ *Sawānīh*, p. 29, *faṣl* 13 (1–2), ll. 2–10. Ghazālī describes love as a wondrous mirror: "What a wondrous mirror is love, for it can behold in itself both the lover and the Beloved; it can see itself both in the Beloved and in others (*aghyār*). And if love's jealousy does not compel it to turn its face from others, the perfect beauty of the Beloved cannot be seen in anything other than love's mirror." See *Sawānīh*, p. 102, *faṣl* 72, ll. 2–5.

5. *Laylī, the ideal beloved*

To see how Laylī is presented as an ideal woman for Majnūn, it is essential to briefly discuss the idealisation of women in Islamic literature in general, particularly in the 'Udhrite love tradition. Several scholars have made statements about the Iranian origin of the idealisation of woman in Islamic culture, but there is as yet no substantial treatment of this important theme. In discussing the "Distorted images of women in literature," Nada Tomiche remarks that it was perhaps under the "influence of the Manichaean beliefs of Persia" that woman came to be regarded as a source of spiritual joy.⁷⁹ She supports her view by referring to the apotheosis of woman in Shi'ism, which exalts Fāṭima, daughter of the Prophet and the wife of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the fourth Caliph and the Prophet's cousin. Tomiche's hypothesis regarding Manichaean origins is debatable, because Manichaeism is a religion rejecting anything material: man's goal is to free his soul from the evil of the world through gnosis. Manichaeism is a strictly dualistic belief, seeking to attain a perfect spiritual state by eliminating all gross matter, including the physical body. Moreover, there is a strong antipathy to sexuality and procreation, and many Manichaeans practised celibacy. The Manichaean concepts of the Virgins of Light, representing the twelve signs of the zodiac, and of celibacy can be easily traced back to Christianity, which influenced Mani's system considerably.⁸⁰ In fact, in discussing the idealisation of woman in Islamic literature generally, and particularly in Nizāmī's works, the Christian aspects cannot be overlooked. Nizāmī's foremost ideal female heroine, Shīrīn, is a Christian girl.

Before the appearance of Islam, both Christianity and Zoroastrianism had glorified a woman: Christians had the Virgin Mary, while Iranians adored the goddess of waters, Ānāhīta, as a symbol of fertility.⁸¹ In addition, although Sunni Islam sanctifies only the figure of Mary Shi'ism also celebrates Fāṭima as the symbol of chastity, loyalty and holiness. These two women, along with Khadīja, the first wife of the Prophet and Āsiyya, the wife of Pharaoh, are the best women ever

⁷⁹ N. Tomiche in *EI*, under al-Mar'a.

⁸⁰ For a succinct description of Mani's religion see Mary Boyce, *A Reader in Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian Texts with Notes*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975, pp. 1-13; see also G. Widengren "Manichaeism and its Iranian Background" in *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 3 (2), pp. 965-84.

⁸¹ See M. Boyce in *EIr*, under Ānāhīt.

created.⁸² In the Koran, Mary is revered for her piety and above all for her virginity.⁸³ These women are often regarded as supernatural beings, as *hūrīs* from Paradise. As N. Tomiche rightly observes, although Islam improved the position of woman to a certain extent, she remained a second rate being from an ontological perspective; she is the second after man in the hierarchy of creation.⁸⁴ Before the advent of Islam, most of the Arab tribes considered women as feeble beings in need of constant help. The birth of a daughter was not welcomed at all, because families believed that it could bring dishonour and poverty. Fathers are said to have buried their daughters alive.

In discussing various aspects of 'Udhrism, Salma Jayyusi argues that the "metamorphosis of the beloved into an ideal womanhood was a rebellion against polygamous marriage, against the cult of concubinage, and against the rejection of celibacy professed by Islam."⁸⁵ Jayyusi's statement is correct, but it also raises the following question. If polygamous marriage, concubinage and the rejection of celibacy were so unwelcome that the new image of women was generated in response, why did these notions and practices survive in Islam alongside the glorification of a woman? A possible explanation can be found in the dual nature of woman in early Islam, which has been retained until the present day. During the early centuries of Islam, foreign ideas, particularly woman's glorification, were imported from Persia and Byzantium to the Islamic holy cities such as Mecca and Medina by the so-called musical slave-girls (*qiyān*).⁸⁶ These girls were cultured and often had poetical ability. According

⁸² See A.J. Wensinck & P. Johnstone in *EI*, under Maryam; for the presentation of Fāṭima in Shi'ism see D. Pinault, "Zaynab Bint 'Alī and the Place of the Women of the Households of the First Imāms in Shi'ite Devotional Literature" in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, pp. 72-5.

⁸³ J.D. McAuliffe, "Chosen of All Women: Mary and Faṭima in Qur'anic Exegesis" in *Islamochristiana*, 7, 1981, pp. 19-28. In Shi'ite tradition, Fāṭima is regarded as a virgin as well. While Mary gave birth through her right thigh, Fāṭima did so through her left thigh. See L.V. Vagleiri in *EI*, under Fāṭima, p. 847.

⁸⁴ N. Tomiche, in *EI*, under, al-Mar'a, p. 467.

⁸⁵ See *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A.F.L. Beeston *et al.*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 426.

⁸⁶ See Ch. Pellat in *EI*, under *ḳayna*; see also R. Kruk "Arabische Courtisanes (Qiyān)" in *Middeleeuwen over Vrouwen*, Deel I, eds. R.E.V. Stuip & C. Vellekoop, Utrecht: Hes Uitgevers, 1985, pp. 95-110; U.M. Daudpota, *The Influence of Arabic Poetry on the Development of Persian Poetry*, Bombay: The Fort Printing Press, 1934, p. 11.

to Tomiche, they constituted themselves as a "civilising influence on the sensitivity, the mind and the taste of an expanding society throughout the Muslim empire."⁸⁷ These foreign girls were both the source of earthly pleasure and the embodiment of moral virtues.

With regard to celibacy in Islam, there are numerous traditions in favour and against it, which makes it difficult to establish whether Islam recognises or rejects the value of celibacy. One thing is certain, however: the Prophet himself offered an example of a married life and advised his followers to marry.

In Islamic Persia, especially in the works of Nizāmī, the ideal woman is compounded of the goddess Ānāhītā and the Virgin Mary. The foremost of Nizāmī's ideal female heroines, Shīrīn, is a Christian who was identified with Ānāhītā as early as the tenth century, for example by Abū 'Imrān al-Kisrawī, in reference to the relief of Ānāhītā at the grotto in the Tāq-i Būstān.⁸⁸ Moreover, although cosmological and ethical works have devoted pages to the vices of the female sex, Ṭūsī, the author of *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt* states: "There are also good women: they are few, but the existence of the world depends upon them: they give birth to great men."⁸⁹ Having said this, Ṭūsī refers to Shīrīn whom he considers as a "perfect woman born of the kings of Rūm (Byzantine)."⁹⁰ The appearance of Shīrīn as an ideal woman in such books, which predate Nizāmī, supports the idea that Shīrīn has been taken as an exemplum for femininity. Nizāmī borrows this idealised picture and enlivens it in his romance. Chelkowski describes Shīrīn as a "well-educated, independent, fearless, resourceful, imaginative, erotic and humorous" character whose "loyalty knows no bounds."⁹¹ It should be noted that Nizāmī's portrait

⁸⁷ Tomiche, in *EL*, under al-Mar'a, p. 468.

⁸⁸ See Priscilla P. Soucek, "Farhād and Tāq-i Būstān The Growth of a Legend" in *Studies in Art and Literature of the Near East in Honor of Richard Ettinghausen*, ed. P.J. Chelkowski et al., New York: New York University, 1974, p. 41. When Nizāmī described the first encounter between the lovers in the sublimely beautiful bathing scene, he was probably aware of the association of water with Ānāhītā (Shīrīn) and Khusrau.

⁸⁹ Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ṭūsī, *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt*, ed. M. Sutūda, Tehran: Nashr wa Tarjuma-yi Kitāb, 1345, pp. 402-03.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 96. Ṭūsī tells how Shīrūya kills Khusrau and wants to marry Shīrīn. Using a trick, Shīrīn rejects Shīrūya and goes to Khusrau's grave where she poisons herself. This is, of course, the version taken over by Nizāmī.

⁹¹ *Mirror of the Invisible World*, p. 47.

of Shīrīn draws on Firdausī's portrayals of the numerous female protagonists in *Shāh-nāma*.⁹²

Shīrīn, Shakar, Maryam, Fitna, Nūshāba and the seven princesses in *Haft paykar*, to name only the most vocal of Nizāmī's female protagonists, all try to teach the male protagonists ethical, social and moral lessons. Shīrīn teaches Khusrau chastity and makes him enter into a monogamous marriage: although deeply in love with Khusrau, she avoids sharing her bed with him as long as he is with another woman. Shakar teaches Khusrau that although she is a brothel-keeper, she has her own integrity and honours virginity, avoiding going to bed with Khusrau before an official marriage.⁹³ Although Nizāmī does not elaborate on the traits of Maryam, the Christian princess of Byzantium and the first wife of Khusrau, her marriage to Khusrau teaches the latter some political lessons: through this union Khusrau avoids war. In *Haft paykar*, although the personal relationship between the lover, King Bahrām, and the seven princesses is not detailed, these princesses each recount a story, which is evidently meant to teach the king a lesson. Apart from these princesses, the most evident and perhaps most important lesson for Bahrām is taught by his musical slave girl, Fitna. In this amazing episode, in a hunting expedition, Fitna challenges the king to transfix the hoof and the ear of an onager with one arrow. The king performs the act successfully, but instead of praising him, Fitna states: *kār-i pur karda kay buwad dushwār*, "how could a much practised work be difficult?"⁹⁴ The king is infuriated by this answer and immediately orders one of his retinue to kill the girl. The courtier spares Fitna's life and she ultimately finds an opportunity to demonstrate the truth of her saying, teaching the king a worthy lesson. Finally, the virgin monarch Nūshāba teaches Alexander such a lesson that he is obliged

⁹² See D. Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Die Frauen im Schahname: Ihre Geschichte und Stellung unter gleichzeitiger Berücksichtigung vor- und nachislamischer Quellen*, Freiburg: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1971.

⁹³ As far as the character of Shakar is concerned, scholars have different opinions. Perhaps the most outspoken view is that of Ḥusayn 'Alī Yūsufī, who severely censures Shakar and believes that this episode damages the romance. It is "an improper and redundant patching" which is "placed in the heart of the story and reduces its power at the most sensitive moment, destabilising the body of the story." See Ḥusayn 'Alī Yūsufī, *Banā-yi 'āshiqī bar bī-qarārī-st*, Tehran: Rūzgār, 1378, pp. 118–19, 156.

⁹⁴ For an analysis of this story see J. Scott Meisami, "Fitna or Āzāda? Nizāmī's Ethical Poetic" in *Edebiyât*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1989, pp. 41–75.

to say: "A thousand bravos to the sagacious woman who guides us with manliness."⁹⁵

In contrast, wicked female protagonists in Nizāmī's works are old, shrewish and ugly. Their names are not even mentioned. The poet refers to them simply as 'the crone' (*'ajūza*).⁹⁶ The crone is often used as a go-between; in *Laylī and Majnūn*, the old woman who chains Majnūn and makes him beg for money may be taken as a go-between in that she brings Majnūn to Laylī, without intending to unite them.

Chelkowski characterises the women in Nizāmī's works as "strong, subtle and virtuous, and at the same time, tender, passionate, and enchantingly beautiful; they have sharp, educated intellects; (. . .) his women are also arrogant, deceitful, cantankerous, vacillating, lonely and despondent."⁹⁷ Although most critics take Shīrīn as the most ideal woman in Nizāmī's *oeuvre*, Laylī closely resembles Shīrīn, although she is portrayed in less detail.⁹⁸ Both are the epitome of physical perfection, and both are chaste and loyal. Both desire to be deflowered by their lovers: Shīrīn wants first to be officially married while Laylī, who is forcefully married to the rich Ibn Salām, courageously fights for her virginity and desires for a legal union with Majnūn. Both are lonely and at times talk to nature about their feelings. Laylī might be said to surpass Shīrīn in spiritual qualities, because of Majnūn's mystical interpretation of her character. As B. Tharwatiyān has said, "Nizāmī is showing (. . .) that if Shīrīn is the archetype of a pious woman in ancient Iran, Laylī is also a pious and mystic women in the Islamic world. Women can also attain an elevated spiritual state."⁹⁹ Laylī lives within a patriarchal Arab society with its severe tribal rules, and she is incarcerated. Shīrīn, in pre-Islamic Persia, can participate in activities ranging from hunting, polo-play and royal banquets to war. Despite the restrictions put upon Laylī, she tries to satisfy all parties to some extent. She remains faithful to

⁹⁵ *Sharaf-nāma*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 295, l. 5.

⁹⁶ For an elaborate discussion of this figure in Persian literature and particularly Nizāmī's *Haft paykar* see L. Rouhi, *Mediation and Love*, pp. 185–6, also see the index under *'ajūz*.

⁹⁷ *Mirror of the Invisible World*, p. 4.

⁹⁸ See J.C. Bürgel, "Die Frau als Person in der Epik Nizāmīs" in *Asiatische Studien*, 2, 1988, pp. 146–47; see also K. Talattof, "Nizami's Unlikely Heroines: A Study of the Characterizations of Women in Classical Persian Literature" in *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi*, pp. 51–81.

⁹⁹ *Guzida-yi makhzan al-asrār*, p. 35.

her father and her tribe. When she finds the opportunity to consummate her love with Majnūn, she avoids doing so to protect her legal marriage. She also remains faithful to Majnūn by keeping her virginity and by arranging meetings with Majnūn.

In *Laylī and Majnūn*, Nizāmī emphasises the spiritual aspects of Laylī. The earliest sources, and other 'Udhrite love stories such as Jamīl and Buthayna, also involve the idealisation of the beloved, when the lover, who is separated from her, sees ideal reflections of her in everything. In other words, the beloved is seen mainly *in absentia*, through the eyes of the lover rather than in actual relation to the other characters of the poem. The 'Udhrite lover makes an ideal woman of his frustrations and of his unattainable love, and the fact that the beloved is unattainable automatically causes her idealisation. This is psychologically plausible. Majnūn's idealisation of Laylī can be understood within this context: in separation she is elevated to the level of the Divine. The exiled lover undergoes a psychological trial, preparing him to switch from the earthly to a heavenly love.

Laylī's perfect beauty is another cause of Majnūn's idealisation, for love is closely related to beauty. Love has such an impact on Majnūn that, in his eyes, no one can match Laylī's beauty. When Majnūn is offered another beautiful maiden, he refuses. In lyrical and romantic poems, the beloved's beauty often hypnotizes the lover. Mystically, Majnūn sees Laylī as an earthly representation, a kind of *shāhid*, ('witness') of the divine Beloved. In addition to religious terminology, Majnūn's idealisation of Laylī is underscored by different metaphors presenting her as the Fountain of Life and Majnūn as Khiḍr, Laylī as a candle and Majnūn as a moth, Laylī as a treasure and Majnūn as a guard.¹⁰⁰ All these metaphors and terminology add to the mystical dimension of Majnūn's relationship with Laylī.

For Majnūn, Laylī is the symbol of a mystery, a treasure, with which she is constantly compared. Laylī's image as a mystery in the religious sense corresponds with the famous tradition in which God uttered: "I was a hidden Treasure and I desired to be known, so I created the creation in order that I might be known." Majnūn searches for this treasure by meditating upon Laylī in the same way

¹⁰⁰ For Laylī's image as the Fountain of Life and Majnūn as Khiḍr see *infra*, chapter 14:6, pp. 332-33.

that a mystic reflects on the Beloved. "Majnūn was exerting himself in search of the treasure (i.e. Laylī)/without finding any trace of it." (Chapter 20:34) In chapter 24:6, Laylī is again compared to a treasure: "The bed-mate of love and the spouse of gracefulness/both the keeper and bestower of the treasure." The metaphor of treasure also has an erotic overtone. In chapter 47:22–23, when Laylī in her letter assures Majnūn of her virginity, she uses the same metaphor.

Laylī's virginity has an ethical as well as economic significance. Despite her marriage, she bravely maintains her virginity, proving thereby her loyalty to Majnūn. What is more, her virginity has a capital value for her father; she is a material treasure, a source of income.¹⁰¹ By forcing her into marriage with a rich man, her father hopes to gain a better social position and material prosperity. Nizāmī emphasises these aspects of Laylī's marriage through his vivid description of Ibn Salām's gifts and of the enthusiastic way Laylī's father receives them. In fact, one of the important features of the *'Udhri* romances is that the beloved woman is sold off by her father to a rich man. There is often a detailed description of the material wealth brought by the future husband. In *'Ayyūqī's Warqa and Gulshāh*, there is a detailed description of the fortune of the king of Syria, who marries Gulshāh against her will. In point of fact, the dowry in Islamic law is the property of the bride, not of her father, but Nizāmī has taken over a motif which must have originated in pre-Islamic sources for the story.

6. *An incarcerated heroine*

As has been noted, Laylī is an imprisoned heroine, which somewhat limits her opportunities to act. However there were some spiritual elements in the original story which enable Nizāmī to add mystical notions to this poem. The female protagonists in his *Khusrau and Shirin* and *Haft paykar*, both set in pre-Islamic Persia, are crowded with female characters who are depicted in accordance with the Iranian epic tradition. *Laylī and Majnūn*, in contrast, has only a few women. Apart from Laylī's friends, whose number and names are

¹⁰¹ For woman's virginity as capital see S. Haeri, *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriages in Shi'i Iran*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1989, p. 67.

not mentioned, five women are named, and only Laylī voices her opinion about various subjects. Zaynab, the beloved of Zayd, never speaks and is accorded only a brief physical description. The old woman who appears in chapter 35 and takes Majnūn to Laylī's tent, is a widow who begs for her daily bread and does not comment on anything. Laylī's mother is just a shadow at the periphery of the story. Majnūn's mother is a sensitive woman, who appears only at the end of the story and talks to Majnūn only after her husband dies; she is just a substitute for 'Āmirī. In short, except for Laylī, the women in this poem are mere silhouettes.

From the beginning of the poem, Niẓāmī repeatedly mentions a few prominent qualities of Laylī, such as her dazzling beauty, her chastity, loyalty, loneliness, deprivation and virginity. These qualities are the keys to recognising the character of Laylī. She is portrayed as a person who is highly aware of her lonely position and expresses her feelings eloquently: she is the only poetess in Niẓāmī's oeuvre. She considers eloping, but the social norms prevent her from undertaking such a deed. From the beginning, Laylī displays strong fealty to social norms and tries to protect her tribe from disgrace. By rejecting elopement, she willingly lays heavy obligations on herself. However hard she tries to maintain social conventions, she remains the target of people's blame: "Because of the idle talk/she remained weeping in the house of sorrow." (chapter 20:4)

She is kept imprisoned in her own house behind the curtains of chastity. In addition to the issues involved in 'Islamic veiling' (*ḥijāb*), the veil is a visible sign of seclusion. Niẓāmī was not in favour of women's withdrawal and veiling, as can be seen from numerous female characters in his romances. The most outspoken statement concerning women's veiling occurs in his *Sharaf-nāma*. Here, when Alexander's soldiers, who have not seen women for a long time, arrive at Qifchāq and see many beautiful unveiled women, Alexander advises the leaders of this region to have their women veiled. The leaders disagree, saying that this is not their custom; their practice is to veil men's eyes instead of forcing women to cover their bodies.¹⁰² In *Laylī and Majnūn*, the poet shows sympathy with the secluded Laylī. In chapter 24, Laylī's mind is revealed to the reader:

Behind the veil (*parda*) where the road was blocked,
she was like a veil whose face was broken.

¹⁰² *Sharaf-nāma*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, pp. 425–26.

She secretly went to the top of the roof,
 gazing from dawn to dusk.
 How could she see Majnūn?
 where would she spend a moment with him?
 With what eyes should she search for him?
 how was she to tell him the secret of her heart?
 (ll. 29–32)

Nizāmī plays skilfully on the word *parda*, which means both ‘curtain,’ ‘veil,’ and ‘musical mode.’ In chapter 27, Nizāmī uses word-play to show how Laylī’s name is publicly disgraced by musicians, yet she gives joy to the listeners:

Laylī was behind the veil of the litter,
 she was tearing the veils (*parda-darī*) [yet] keeping the secret (*parda-dār*).
 She had bid farewell to the veil (*parda*) of good and bad name,
 and had entered the mode (*parda*) of the flute and the harp.
 She was the sweetmeat for singers of love,
 she was the fresh herb for the essence of perfume-makers.
 She was celebrated in the book of lovers,
 and had tasted the musician’s cymbal.¹⁰³
 (ll. 1–4)

In chapter 36, Laylī is again associated with the *parda*. When Laylī’s father tells her how he has deceived Naufal and thus rejected Laylī’s personal choice of marriage-partner, she becomes so disappointed that she retreats

Behind the veil (*parda*), heaving a sigh secretly;
 she maintained respect (*parda*) for her father.¹⁰⁴
 When her father went outside the veil (*parda*),
 her narcissus became rose-coloured because of tears.
 She let so many tears stream along her lashes
 that she swept the dust from her way. (. . .)
 There was no succourer to whom she could tell her tale;
 there was no beloved with whom she might find a solution.
 In the confinement of her house, upon the roof,
 she lived like a snake whose head is cut off. (. . .)
 With a hundred dissimulations, she consumed her
 heart in secret, and in public her wine.
 Her face blazed like a candle with laughter,
 she laughed, but behind the laughter, she was burning.
 (ll. 12–14, 18–19, 27–8)

¹⁰³ The plectrum of a cymbal/tambour.

¹⁰⁴ This hemistich is ambiguous. It can also be translated as “she kept it secret from her father.”

Laylī is compared to a candle, which slowly burns down while no one notices that it is selflessly effacing itself in giving light to others. Nizāmī frequently shows the pain and emotions love causes through the image of a weeping candle which burns out of protest. In Persian love poetry, candle imagery is used to depict various aspects of the relationship between the lover and the beloved.¹⁰⁵ The lover often compares his emaciation to the candle's burning. The lover's fear of the beloved is compared to the candle's perspiration: that is, the melted wax. Comparing himself to the candle, the lover sometimes proves that his burning is more intense than that of the candle: "By weeping, you (the candle) become fat, but I become emaciated."¹⁰⁶ The lover considers the candle's wick as the 'cord of life' (*rishta-yi jān*), which is set on fire. The lover perishes at one breath from the beloved.¹⁰⁷ The candle's tongue burns because it has revealed the secret of love. At times, the lover presents himself as the candle and the moth as his companion who shares his sorrow.¹⁰⁸ The lover may ask himself why he burns like a candle while it is the beloved whose brilliant face looks like the candle's flame.¹⁰⁹ The molten wax that gathers at the base of the flame is compared to water, which has immersed the lover. Only his tongue (i.e. the flame) extends from this water, because of thirst.¹¹⁰

Nizāmī's extensive use of the candle metaphor in *Laylī and Majnūn* depicts different aspects of the lovers' relationship. In chapter 15:28, Majnūn compares Laylī to a candle burning in his soul. This is an effective way of expressing how the fire of love is burning inside Majnūn: "O hidden candle of the chamber of my soul/do not afflict your very own moth." In chapter 35:55–6, Majnūn compares his heart to the candle's flame and desires to be beheaded by Laylī:

Like a candle, my heart is full of light
why should I fear if you chop off my head.

¹⁰⁵ In *Mukhtār-nāma*, 'Attār devotes three chapters to candle metaphors, analysing poetically its wide range of applications. See *Mukhtār-nāma*, ed. M.R. Shaff'ī Kadkanī, Tehran: Sukhan, 1375, pp. 312–339, qq. 1816–2044. Khalīl Shirwānī also devotes one chapter to the candle and its association with the beloved in *Nuzhat al-majālis*. See *Nuzhat al-majālis*, third chapter, qq. 149–224.

¹⁰⁶ *Nuzhat al-majālis*, (1366) p. 135; (1375) p. 171, q. 204.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, (1366) p. 135; (1375) p. 171, q. 201.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, (1366) p. 129; (1375) p. 166, q. 162.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, (1366) p. 130; (1375) p. 166, q. 164.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, (1366) p. 132; (1375) p. 168, q. 183.

The candle is released from its headache
at the time that its head is cut off.

Using the same candle imagery, the poet demonstrates the love pains that Laylī suffers and how she hides her passionate feelings for Majnūn from her tribe and seeks consolation in her nightly sighs. The burning candle is outwardly light and inwardly consumes itself. The imagery shows Laylī's double life:

Like a candle, she lived with a forced smile,
she laughed sweetly and wept bitterly. (...)
She was burning through the fire of separation,
neither smoke, nor light could be seen in her.
Outwardly she lamented like the wind,
inwardly she consumed her heart like the earth.¹¹¹

(chapter 24: 34, 36–7)

In several places of the poem, the lover's physical appearance is compared to the candle.¹¹² For example, Majnūn's constant weeping and emaciation is depicted by the image of a crying candle in chapter 34:38: "Majnūn shed tears from his eyes until dawn/like a candle which burns itself." Laylī's body and behaviour are also depicted using candle imagery. In chapter 57:26, when Ibn Salām dies, Laylī becomes more outspoken and her character changes. In the following simile, Nizāmī demonstrates the change in her bodily appearance and in her emotions: "Like a candle she quickly bent/and turned her cry into a laugh." Another candle metaphor occurs in chapter 62:45–6 in which Majnūn mourns over Laylī's grave. Here Nizāmī shows man's impotence in the face of death. Majnūn is compared to a candle that is burning and unable to do anything. What is more, Majnūn's tongue is compared to the candle's flame. This

¹¹¹ The earth consumes man's body. Nizāmī is showing how Laylī has become emaciated by sorrow. The compound *jigar-khārī*, literally 'eating the liver,' means to be sorrowful. For information about the liver as the seat of sorrow, see A. Giladi, "The Child was small . . . not so the grief for him': Sources, Structure and Content of al-Sakhawī's Consolation Treatise for Bereaved Parents" in *Poetics Today*, 1993, 14, pp. 367–86.

¹¹² For the candle and moth imagery see J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Elr*, under Candle: ii. Imagery in Poetry; see also G.J.H. van Gelder, in *El*, under Sham'a; J. Matīnī, "Parwāna wa sham'" in *Irānshināsi*, Vol. 6, No. 4, Winter 1995; N. Pūrjawādī, "Parwāna wa ātash: sayr-i tahawwul-i yik tamthīl-i 'irfānī dar adabiyāt-i Fārsī" in *Nashr-i Danish*, 16, No. 2, Summer 1378, pp. 3–15; and my article "De Kaars en de Nachtvliinder: een Liefdesmetafoor in Perzische poëzie" in *Sharqiyyāt*, 2001, No. 12, pp. 1–19.

is an effective way of presenting both Majnūn's burning and his complaint about the injustice of heaven:

Like a candle, he refined his sorrow's blood (i.e. tears)
 untying his fiery tongue:
 'O what shall I do, what is my solution
 for I am burning with pain like a candle?'

Laylī has no friends and is in utter isolation. Her only companions, as explained in chapter 24:38–40, are soulless objects such as her own shadow, a mirror and her veil. When she cries, it is her own veil that embraces her and consoles her. She lives between her emotions and severe tribal norms; between imposed marriage vows and her deep love for Majnūn. Being isolated in this way, she frequently speaks to a mirror and to her own shadow. Although imprisoned in her parental house, when she finds an opportunity, she goes secretly to a garden and speaks to birds and plants. In chapter 25, Laylī speaks to a garden, showing her desire to see Majnūn:

Her intention was to go into a shelter
 to breathe a sigh like those who are burned.
 To reveal her secret to the intoxicated nightingale
 and to retell the sorrows of the past.
 To find a sign from her separated beloved
 in the breeze of the rose garden. (. . .)
 Lonely, she sat under a cypress
 like a pheasant sitting under the parrot's wing.¹¹³
 She moaned and lamented secretly
 while saying by way of affection:
 'O my amiable and loyal friend,
 you who resemble me and suit me well,
 O, young and chivalrous cypress,
 you who has a warm heart and a cold breath,
 O, what would happen in this garden if you
 arrived and removed the pain from my heart;
 To sit with me according to the desire of the heart,
 that I can see the elm-tree and you the cypress.
 Suppose that you have no rest because of me,
 that you do not dare to come to my dwelling and my garden,

¹¹³ The cypress and the pheasant (*sarw u tazarrw*) are taken in Persian literature as personified lovers. The sixteenth century poet Nithārī of Tūn versifies their love-story. For an analysis of this romance see H. Dhulfaqārī, *Manzūmahā-yi 'āshiqāna*, pp. 279–303.

can't you after all send me a message
in your famous language.'
(ll. 35-7, 48-55)

This display of her emotions has grave consequences for Laylī because one of her companions eavesdrops on her and "does not conceal her secret," revealing it without delay to her mother. This scene and the betrayal of Laylī by her friend can be taken as a contrast with the scene in which Khusrau and Shīrīn and her friends are sitting in the meadow, and telling stories to each other in a harmonious way.¹¹⁴ Unlike Shīrīn's friends who are one by one identified, Laylī's friends remain very obscure figures indeed. Shīrīn's friends help her to achieve her goal and are faithful to her, but Laylī's friends betray her and no conversation takes place between Laylī and her friends.

Being helpless to decide, Laylī complains about being a woman several times in chapter 46. She compares her sorrow to that of Majnūn, concluding that her suffering is much worse than his since she is a woman. Nizāmī stresses this aspect of Laylī by depicting her pain and deprivation in vivid imagery. In older sources, very little attention is paid to Laylī's anguish. Bābā Tāhir of Hamadān's quatrain, which brings out Laylī's distress, is perhaps a unique poetic expression:

It is better if the absence of love is from two sides
For a one-sided love is the misery of the heart.
Although Majnūn had a distressed heart,
Laylī's heart was much more distressed.¹¹⁵

The narrator demonstrates that Laylī cannot publicly express her feelings without damaging her own and her tribe's reputation in male-dominated surroundings. According to Laylī, it is because of her gender that she is imprisoned and cannot decide for herself. Despite her awareness of the situation and of her own power as a woman, her final conclusion is that since she is a woman, she has to accept injustice and endure sorrow. She is afraid of the people around her:

I was Laylī but now I am a
thousand times more possessed (*majnūn*) than Majnūn. (. . .)
Although he is the target of pain,

¹¹⁴ *Khusrau u Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwatiyān, chapter 38, pp. 261-64.

¹¹⁵ *Bābā Tāhir-nāma*, p. 270.

he is after all not a woman like me, but a man.
 He is nimble in the art of love;
 he is not afraid of anyone.
 He will not desist because of torture;
 his step goes wherever he wishes.
 I am the poor person, who has no one
 to whom I may speak for a moment openly.
 I fear that because of selflessness and unripeness
 I will become a stranger for the sake of good repute. (. . .)
 I have neither the heart to rise against my spouse,
 nor the courage to escape from my father.
 Sometimes love, which is in my heart, tells me to rise,
 to flee like a partridge from this black sparrow and crow.
 Sometimes my reputation says: "Sit,
 a falcon is mightier than a partridge."
 Although a woman can throw to the ground mighty men,
 she remains a woman because she is a woman.
 Imagine that a woman is brave in her blood,
 she remains a woman indeed, although she is a lion.
 Since I could not withdraw myself from this pain,
 I submitted myself to endure sorrow.
 (ll. 49, 50-55, 59 64)

In a letter to Majnūn, Laylī informs him that although she has married Ibn Salām, she is still a virgin. Sīrjānī, inexplicably, says that Laylī gives her body to her husband, but the text is explicit that she avoids sexual contact with Ibn Salām.¹¹⁶ In fact, the avoidance of physical contact is a prerequisite in this kind of romance. Generally speaking, sexual consummation occurs in Nizāmī's works only with mutual consent, preferably after an official marriage motivated by love. Unlike protagonists such as Shakar and Shīrīn, who choose marriage over love, Laylī prefers chaste love to marriage. In chapter 47, she not only expresses her feelings towards Majnūn, but also shows spontaneously that Majnūn is the only one with whom she desires to spend her life:

Although my imposed mate is my husband,
 he has not slept with me one single night.
 I have been touched but my pearl is not pierced;
 no-one's diamond has tried it.
 The treasure of my jewel, which has a sealed door,
 inclines towards the sun like the rosebud in the garden.¹¹⁷ (. . .)

¹¹⁶ Sa'īdī Sīrjānī, *Sīmā-yi du zan*, p. 31.

¹¹⁷ In this couplet, Nizāmī uses the homographs, *muhr*, 'seal' and *mīhr*, 'the sun'

I desire someone in this world,
 someone like you to be my home-mate. (. . .)
 Since I cannot live together with you,
 what is my sin that I am living in this way?
 That heart which is not content with you
 could better perish under heaven's harsh decree (*qaḍā-yi bad*). (. . .)
 A lock of your hair is a world for me,
 a thorn from your path is a rose garden.
 The traces of your encampment are green and you have a green skirt;
 agree with me like the Water of Khidr (*i.e.* Fountain of Life).
 I am the moon and you are the sun because of [your] light,
 I open my eye through your [light] from a distance.
 (ll. 21-3, 28, 30-1, 33-5)

While in bonds of marriage, Laylī shows her sympathy with Majnūn by writing to him and expressing her condolences on his father's death. She tells Majnūn that she has put on blue clothes as a sign of mourning: "Due to my friendship and sympathy with you/I have satisfied the requirements of mourning." (l. 40) All this time, the frustrated Ibn Salām keeps watch over her, longing to touch her:

In the circle of the thread, she was in a knot
 imprisoned in bonds, though not bound.
 Her husband kept watch all day,
 walking around her, desiring to deflower her.
 So that she could not flee at night like the drunkards
 to a corner of the temple of idol-worshippers.
 (chapter 52, ll. 4-6)

7. *Laylī's imposed marriage*

Nizāmī questions the consequences of a loveless marriage in this romance by including the episode of Laylī's betrothal to Ibn Salām. In chapter 36, when Ibn Salām hears the news of Majnūn's utter rejection by Laylī's father, he sends a messenger with loads of gold to present his marriage proposal. Astounded by Ibn Salām's lavish wedding gifts, Laylī's father consents without hesitation. As the narrator puts, he "gives the moon to the jaws of the dragon." During the wedding ceremony, Laylī's torrent of tears do not stop: "From the damp of her heart, she spread an odour/and was shedding tears

and 'love.' The second hemistich can also be translated as follows: "(. . .) is sealed like a rosebud in the garden."

like bitter rose-water." (36:63) The narrator shows his disapproval of this imposed marriage using several metaphors and proverbial sayings:

Near the mouth, the cup broke;
 the sweet-meat, which was cooked, became raw again.
 If you step on a thorn, it will pierce [your foot];
 if you put fire in your mouth, it will burn.
 A limb/member that turned against you
 will not follow your orders. (...)
 If a finger is bitten by a snake,
 it is necessary to cut it from the hand.
 Life is the cure that comes from a harmonious nature (*tab'*),
 dying is due to disharmony.
 (ll. 66-8, 70-1)

The implication is that Laylī will be like a thorn in her husband's foot, a fire in his mouth, and ultimately, the disharmony will lead to his death. The narrator's disapproval coincides closely with Niẓāmī's idea on marriage expressed in his other works. The narrator has an equally negative attitude to Laylī's husband, as we shall shortly see. In some of Niẓāmī's works the female protagonists are free to choose their marriage partners, and in others they face marriages that are arranged for political and economic purposes, depending on the social context. The idea of marriage presented in *Laylī and Majnūn* is totally different to that in *Haft paykar*, *Khusrau and Shirīn* and the *Sharaf-nāma*. In the *Sharaf-nāma*, the dying Persian king Darius asks Alexander to marry his daughter, Raushanak (Roxana), a political alliance without reference to the girl's feelings. When the marriage is about to be performed, Raushanak's mother advises her to obey the king and she "entrusts the precious shell to the ocean" (32:11). In *Haft paykar*, no mention is made of the princesses' feelings for Bahrām. Niẓāmī refers to fate here, but he also says that the king was determined to attain the seven princesses by love, money or war.¹¹⁸ There are also purely political marriages in Niẓāmī's *oeuvre*, as when Khusrau marries Maryam, the daughter of the Byzantine emperor.

Laylī has a frozen relationship with her husband. The emotionally and sexually frustrated Ibn Salām is repeatedly portrayed as a thorn, a dragon or a fly while Laylī is depicted as a rose, a treasure and sweet honey. This is partly shown in chapter 57:

¹¹⁸ *Haft paykar*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, pp. 134-35.

Laylī, who was the light of heart-ravishers,
 was suffering to herself and treasure to others.
 A treasure around which a serpent
 had formed a fortified circle.
 She lived in that narrow rack,
 like a grain of ruby in the heart of a stone.
 Although she was a precious gem
 she was like the moon in the mouth of a dragon.
 (ll. 11-14)

The narrator often criticises Ibn Salām. For instance, when Ibn Salām dies because he did not follow his prescribed regimen the narrator rebukes him and delivers a long speech about the virtues of following a regimen.¹¹⁹ J. Scott Meisami says that Ibn Salām's "despair at her (Laylī's) coldness robs him of the will to live."¹²⁰ Beyond that, the cause is his conscious decision to marry someone who does not love him. Indeed, the narrator portrays Ibn Salām as an affluent, but intellectually and spiritually shallow person. Nizāmī shows that a loveless marriage is doomed to failure. At the beginning, in chapter 36, Ibn Salām tries his best to win Laylī's love and to deflower her, but his attempts remain futile:

For two or three days by way of forbearance
 he was benignly melting the wax (Laylī).
 When the date became audacious with the date-tree,
 and touched a branch of the date-tree,
 It received a thorn from that walking date-tree,
 such that he could not sleep for some time because of the pain.¹²¹
 Laylī beat him with such a blow,
 that he fell senseless like a dead man.
 She said: "If you do such an act one more time,
 you will be a fugitive from yourself and from me."
 I swear by my Creator,
 who has adorned my idol (Majnūn) by his divine creation

¹¹⁹ Medical works usually praised compliance with a regimen. See Ḥakīm Maysarī, *Dānish-nāma*, p. 40, ll. 605-611.

¹²⁰ J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 162; the same idea is presented by Sa'īdī Sīrjānī, *Sīmā-yi du zan*, p. 23. Rasūl Parwīzī defends Ibn Salām in a cynical way and invites people to have sympathy with him. Parwīzī sees Majnūn as a madman who prevents Ibn Salām from living his everyday life (Parwīzī, *Lūlī-yi sar-mast*, Tehran: Parastū, 1352, pp. 157-68, as cited by S. Ḥamīdīyān, *Ārmān-shahr-i zibā'i*, p. 200).

¹²¹ For a study of the date in Nizāmī's romances see Ch. Van Ruymbeke, "From Culinary Recipe to Pharmacological Secret for a Successful Wedding Night: the Scientific Background of Two Images Related to Fruit in the Xamse of Nezāmī Ganjavī" in *Persica*, Leuven: Peeters, 2001, Vol. 17, pp. 127-36.

That your selfish intentions cannot be fulfilled through me
even if your blade may shed my blood.

(ll. 79–85)

Figures such as Ibn Salām who never consummate their marriage are stock characters in *‘Udhrite* romances. For instance, in ‘Ayyūqī’s *Warqa and Gulshāh*, when Gulshāh’s imposed husband forces her to sleep with him, she tries to kill herself with a dagger.¹²² Like Ibn Salām, Gulshāh’s husband takes satisfaction in looking at her. In the same poem, when Rabī‘ b. ‘Adnān, Gulshāh’s kidnapper, wants to deflower her, Gulshāh deceives him by saying that she has her period.¹²³

There is no conversation between Laylī and her husband. The extract cited above is the only one-sided verbal interaction between the two. Laylī is in a difficult position, between the demands of marriage and her love. On the one hand, she has to protect both the name of her tribe and the name of her husband, but this is contrary to her actual personal feelings and emotions. On the other hand, she remains faithful to Majnūn, a person who has dishonoured the name of her tribe and whose blood can therefore be shed with impunity. Moreover, eloping with Majnūn would have far-reaching consequences. To maintain her chastity after her marriage, she gives her husband such a blow on the wedding night that he cannot sleep for several nights. Despite this violent rejection, Ibn Salām does not take any other woman and waits patiently for Laylī. Indeed (despite Sīrjānī’s theory of a harem) the characters in *Laylī and Majnūn* are monogamous. No mention whatsoever is made of a harem in the poem. *‘Udhrite* love stories are founded on monogamous relationships, concentrating on one beloved, on chastity and on the avoidance of any physical contact. Several times people suggest to Majnūn that he should find another maiden, but he remains hoping for union with Laylī. Likewise, when Laylī’s father postpones Ibn Salām’s first marriage proposal, Ibn Salām patiently waits for an appropriate moment to propose for a second time. Being unable to gratify himself with his own virgin wife, Ibn Salām becomes so obsessed that

¹²² *Warqa u Gulshāh*, p. 118.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 54. Gulshāh says: “But I have my period (*walīkan marā hast ‘udhr-i zanān*)/you have to give me one week // when my period is over/no one but you is my lord.”

he keeps watch night and day over Laylī: "Her husband guarded her every day/he fed on sorrow but he was content." (chapter 57:15) Laylī hides her love for Majnūn from her husband and her father. She sheds tears in the absence of her husband and when Ibn Salām appears, she immediately smiles and hides her sorrow.¹²⁴ Although she rejects her husband sexually, Laylī remains faithful to him until his death. She even mourns for him. As the narrator states: she isolates herself for about two years according to the Arabian tradition.

After Ibn Salām's death, Laylī finally finds an opportunity to cry openly and to relieve her heart. In the following scene, Niẓāmī demonstrates Laylī's divided loyalty and her complex situation: under the guise of her husband's death, she weeps for her separation from Majnūn:

Because of the departure of her spouse,
 who could not satisfy his desires,
 Laylī was fidgeting in her place like an onager in a noose.
 Although she expected profit from his departure,
 she was sorrowful because he was her husband after all.
 She cried for the sake of her husband,
 while she was secretly remembering her friend.
 Because of the suffering of the friend she pulled out her hair
 but she pulled out her hair because of her husband, the uninvited
 guest.

Lamenting over the separation of the friend,
 she concealed it with wailing for her husband. (. . .)
 Because of the friend she was shedding tears,
 taking her husband as a pretext.
 When she raised a wail for her husband,
 she did it after the manner of her friend.
 Her husband was only the outside;
 to her the kernel was the beloved, the friend.
 It is the custom of the Arabs that after the death of a husband,
 the woman should not turn her face towards any man.
 She should shut herself up in the house, a year or two,
 she should not see anyone, nor should anyone see her.
 (ll. 66-70, 72-6)

¹²⁴ See chapter 57:18, 20-1 "Whenever her husband was not near her, she wept/and when her husband came, she would rub her eyes // (. . .) She wanted to cry for a while openly because of that sorrow/but she had not the courage to do so for a moment // Hidden grief will consume the soul/who on earth wants to consume one's own soul?"

Laylī's lament is not typical of the lamentations in classical Persian, in which various techniques are used to lament the deceased person.¹²⁵ Although the lamenter surrenders to the loss of the dead person, in the end he usually 'feigns ignorance' (*tajāhul al-ʿarīf*) by denying the death of the person and by speaking to him as if the dead person has fallen asleep. The lamenter usually complains of life's transient nature and refers to his own painful situation. In Laylī's complaint, the emphasis is on the heroine's double life and her lamentation is actually for her separation from Majnūn.

In this context, it is interesting to see Majnūn's response to Ibn Salām's death. In chapter 58:28–32, when Zayd brings the news of Ibn Salām's death to Majnūn, he reacts in the following way:¹²⁶

He shouted such a tumultuous cry
that a quaking fell in heaven.
Sometimes his excitement made him dance for joy;
at times he saw his own face in the grave.
On the one hand, he liked what had happened,
that the thorn was removed from the rose,
On the other hand, he took into consideration
that the same would overcome him as well.
He did not laugh, as his nature required him to do;
he cried because his reason asked this from him.

Forced to enter into a marriage, Laylī has no one to rely upon; she cannot even trust her mother, a shadowy character, the opposite of Mahīn Bānū, the aunt of Shīrīn, who advises Shīrīn in matters of love and teaches her how to deal with men. In chapter 35 of *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, Mahīn Bānū advises Shīrīn not to be deceived by Khusrau and not to lose her virginity before she has officially married the king:

Although you see his impatience,
it is not right to give ear to his deceit.
By his sweet tongue (*shīrīn zabānī*) he must not
eat [your] sweet-meat (*halwā-yi shīrīn*) freely.

¹²⁵ For several aspects of lamentation see J.T.P. de Bruijn in *Elr*, under Elegy; O.M. Davidson "Women's Lamentations as Protest in the 'Shāhnāma'" in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, pp. 131–46.

¹²⁶ The way Majnūn reacts to Ibn Salām's death corresponds almost entirely to Shīrīn's reaction to the death of her rival Maryam. See *Khusrau u Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwatyān, p. 438: "In a way, she became glad through her death/for her pure soul was released from envy // In another way, she was sorrowful and showed her sympathy with her/because she was wise and she was afraid of that day (i.e. Judgement Day)."

He will leave you behind, when you are infected by him,
going after the passion of someone else.¹²⁷

In other words, Nizāmī condemns sex before marriage. In the seventh tale of *Haft paykar*, one of the characters passionately desires to make love to a girl but is unable to succeed. Each time he approaches her something happens. He deflowers her only after an official marriage.¹²⁸ In addition, in the scene in which the drunken Khusrau stands at the door of Shīrīn's palace and desires to spend the night with her, Shīrīn does not consent, but insists on being officially married first. In the episode of Shakar of Isfahān we have the brothel-keeper, who is a virgin, and whose chastity is emphasised.¹²⁹ This virtue proves eventually to be a catalyst for Khusrau to marry her. Shakar does not want to share her bed with him before they are officially married. Nūshāba, another of Nizāmī's ideal female protagonist in *Sharaf-nāma*, has no sexual need.

After having advised Shīrīn, Mahīn Bānū speaks of woman's dignity, of the equality between man and woman, and of the preference for sexual consummation after marriage:

If he (Khusrau) is the moon, we are then the sun;
If he is Kay Khusrau, we are Afrāsiyāb.¹³⁰
To go after a man is not manly,
it is better for a woman not to be generous.
There were many roses, which were plucked fresh and fragile,
and were thrown away after having been smelt.
Many a wine, which was poured into a goblet,
was thrown away when a draught of it had been tasted.
You yourself know best that at the time of glorification
marriage is better than practising love with the beloved.¹³¹

In contrast to Mahīn Bānū, Laylī's mother is portrayed as a whimsical and passive person. Due to her indecision, she does not know whether she should encourage her daughter to go to Majnūn or to remain in the bonds of an unhappy marriage. She never speaks to Laylī, to her husband or to anybody else. At the end of the poem on Laylī's deathbed, it is Laylī who asks her mother a favour. In chapter

¹²⁷ *Khusrau u Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwatiyān, p. 245, ll. 13-5.

¹²⁸ *Haft paykar*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, see especially pp. 304-15.

¹²⁹ For a study of Nizāmī's view on chastity (*'iffa*) see M. Tharwat, *Ganjīna-yi hikmat*, pp. 127-31.

¹³⁰ This is a reference to Iranian mythical kings.

¹³¹ *Khusrau u Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwatiyān, p. 246, ll. 22-6.

25:72, when Laylī's unfaithful friend reveals the news of Laylī's love for Majnūn to her mother, the latter is compared to "a bird in snares." The only thing she has to say in the entire poem is:

If I give her (Laylī) up, that one (Majnūn) has become mad (*shīfla*),
and this one (Laylī) will become drunken.
And if I act patiently towards her,
she will not let him go, but I must let her go.
(ll. 73-4)

8. *Meetings between Laylī and Majnūn*

No point-by-point analysis of the meetings between Laylī and Majnūn is available. Such an analysis is, however, essential to establishing the lovers' relationship, especially since some scholars have said that Laylī is a passive character undertaking no action. This view is unwarranted when Laylī's position and decisions are carefully studied. The lovers deeply desire to meet each other from the beginning of the poem. Being a passionate lover, Majnūn discerns Laylī everywhere, whether it is in the holy Ka'ba, a gazelle, a deer, a dog, or dust blown in the air. He goes several times to Laylī's quarter, looking at her from a distance (14:46; 15:11; 16:4; 17:3). The remarkable point is that Majnūn is highly aware of people's reproach for his action and behaviour. In chapter 18, he defends himself against the people who interpret his contemplation of Laylī as an act of idol-worship:

Sometimes people rebuke me and call me a drunkard,
at times they call me an idol-worshipping lover.
Do not look at me as an idol-worshipper,
I have a rose (*gul*) in my hand; I do not worship clay (*gil*).
(ll. 27-8)

By the subtle play on the words rose and clay, which are homographs in Persian, Majnūn shows that people who criticise him are unable to distinguish the rose from the clay. The former stands for the immaterial Beloved while the latter symbolises the earthly beloved in Persian mystical poetry.

Despite his passionate desire to see Laylī, as soon as Majnūn comes near to her, he collapses. In drawing the passages in which Majnūn swoons at Laylī's presence, Nizāmī had at his disposal not only Persian anecdotes on this particular aspect of Majnūn but also the

Koranic models such as the Day of *Alast*, when Adam was absorbed completely in the divine Beauty. In addition, God's manifestation to Moses on Mount Sinai and Zulaykhā's fainting before the beauty of Yūsuf were among the favoured mystical motives. The lover's collapse in the presence of the beloved has been discussed by many love-theorists such as Aḥmad Ghazālī and Rūzbihān Baqlī. They refer to the lover's inability to look at the brilliant manifestation of the beloved. This idea is based on God's manifestation to Adam in pre-eternity. When Adam beheld God, he was overwhelmed by His awe-inspiring majesty (*jalāl*) and His fascinating beauty (*jamāl*). As Sanā'ī sings in one of his *ghazals*, God's Beauty lends existence to the lovers, whereas His majesty makes them lose themselves in Him; in other words, the beauty is a trap set by the beloved to catch the lover.¹³² In addition, Moses collapsed on seeing a bit of the shadow of God's manifestation on Mount Sinai. Using the poetic figure of 'hyperbole' (*mubālagha*), poets depict Mount Sinai crumbling before the majestic presence of the Divine.

The story in which Majnūn faints in the presence of Laylī was very popular both before and during Niẓāmī's time, in mystic circles. In such anecdotes, Laylī stands for the divine Beloved and Majnūn as an archetype of the selfless lover.¹³³ Aḥmad Ghazālī's telling is one of the earliest versions:

It is reported that the people of Majnūn's tribe came together and addressed Laylī's clan: 'This man (Majnūn) is going to die because of love. It would do no harm if he were allowed to see Laylī, just one time.' They answered: 'We do not act selfishly with regard to your request, but Majnūn has not the strength to see her.' Majnūn was brought before Laylī's tent. The shadow of Laylī had not yet come into sight when Majnūn turned 'mad' (*majnūn*). He fainted on the dust of her threshold. Laylī's tribe said: 'We warned you that he has not the power to see her.' It is for this reason that Majnūn takes satisfaction with the dust of the end of Laylī's alley.¹³⁴

Fainting before the beloved shows the intensity of the lover's love. Apart from collapsing before the beloved, the eloquent lover also becomes speechless. Hujwīrī connects this aspect of love to the

¹³² *Jamālat kard jānā hast mā rā/jalālat kard māhā past mā rā*, "O Beloved, your Beauty brought us into existence/O Moon, your Majesty made us humble." Sanā'ī, *Diwān*, p. 790.

¹³³ See 'Aṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 108, ll. 1-13; Kāshānī's *Kunūz al-asrār*, p. 16, ll. 310-27.

¹³⁴ *Sawānih*, pp. 45-6, *faṣl* 25, ll. 9-14.

Prophet's encounter with the Divine during the night of Ascension.¹³⁵ In the same way that the Prophet said to God: "I cannot tell Thy praise," when Majnūn meets Laylī, he is dumbfounded before her.

Being a lover, Majnūn's senses have become extremely sharp, especially his smell and touch; he constantly desires to be united with Laylī. During a war, which is waged by Naufal against Laylī's tribe, Majnūn suddenly smells the scent of Laylī and stops fighting. It is because of Laylī's scent that Majnūn's attention is diverted. All the other soldiers continue their fight, while Majnūn looks for Laylī. In fact, not being able to smell Laylī's scent, the soldiers accuse Majnūn of madness. Fragrance is one of the integral attributes of the beloved and is repeatedly referred to in the poem. It plays a significant role not only in Persian love poetry but also in other genres.¹³⁶ In Persian lyrical poetry, the lovers often pass out when they smell the beloved's sweet scent.¹³⁷ Compounds such as 'the soul's scent' (*bū-yi jān*), 'the fragrance of love' (*bū-yi 'ishq*) and so fourth are commonplace, and show the sharp perception of a person in love. Majnūn is extremely sensitive and smells either figuratively or literally 'the scent of fidelity' (*bū-yi wafā*), and 'the beloved's scent' (*bū-yi yār*). Laylī's scent occurs so regularly in love poetry that one may speak of it as a *topos*. 'Aṭṭār tells a story in *Manṭiq at-ṭayr* in which Majnūn disguises himself to go near Laylī's quarter and to smell her scent.¹³⁸ The beloved perfumes herself with flowers, saffron, ambergris, musk, wine, etc. In *Muṣibat-nāma*, when Majnūn hears about Laylī's death, he runs towards the graveyard. When someone offers to show him her grave, Majnūn replies that he can find it by smelling Laylī.¹³⁹ There are several references to Laylī's scent in the poem (14:45; 16:27; 52:79–81).¹⁴⁰ When an old man asks Majnūn to go to Laylī, he

¹³⁵ *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 333.

¹³⁶ In *Khusraw ut rēlag*, (*Khusraw and the Page*), a king tests the knowledge of a page by asking him about various arts including the most sweet-scented things. The importance of the knowledge of scents is highlighted when we learn that the page can serve as one of the king's retainers only if he answers the king's questions correctly. For a New Persian text see M. Mu'in, *Majmū'a-yi maqālāt*, Vol. 1, pp. 80–102. See J.M. Unvala, *The Pahlavi Text: 'King Khusraw and His Boy'*, Paris: Paul Geuthner, date missing, pp. 31–4.

¹³⁷ See, for instance, *Nuzhat al-majālis*, (1366) p. 123, (1375) p. 123, q. 130.

¹³⁸ *Manṭiq at-ṭayr*, pp. 188–89. Scent plays sometimes a central role in love stories. In Yūsuf stories, the scent of Yūsuf's coat heals Ya'ghūb's blindness.

¹³⁹ *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 273.

¹⁴⁰ Lyrical poetry also contains many references to the sweet scent of the beloved.

declines saying: "Since I am drunken by the scent of the wine (Laylī)/how can I hold the wine in my hand." (l. 86)

Apart from smelling the beloved, there are several references to Majnūn's desire to kiss Laylī: the sense of touch. In chapter 14:47, every night Majnūn goes to Laylī's quarter, kisses her door and returns. In chapter 18:58 he desires to kiss Laylī's hand. Since in *'Udhrite* romances there is hardly any physical contact, the poet usually refers to the lovers' longing to touch each other.

In the same way that Majnūn had grasped the coil of the Ka'ba's door-knocker as if it were a coil of the beloved's lock, he desires to unite himself with Laylī's lock in several passages. In chapter 53:92-4 in which Majnūn sings a love song for Laylī, he displays his desire for union with Laylī, ignoring people's blame:

What is more delightful than being drunk,
grasping the coil of your lock.
To catch the tip of your lock harmlessly
and bring you drunkenly to the bazaar.
To drink betimes morning wine during my each step
and to gain victory from each kick [receiving from people].

This masochistic aspect of the *'Udhrite* love both intensifies the lover's yearning and creates a nostalgic feeling of intimacy in him. The narrator gives various reasons for the lovers' physical avoidance: when at the time of union Laylī refers to her marital state, Majnūn flees into the desert to save the religion of love. It is this avoidance of touch that produces poetry: the lover pours his fervid desire into poetic form, expressing his strong yearning to touch the beloved.

In addition to the scene in which Laylī and Majnūn fall in love with each other in chapter 14 and the following chapter, in which Majnūn goes to visit Laylī's tent, there are three actual meetings between them. The first is in chapter 35:31-2, in which an old woman accidentally takes the voluntarily manacled Majnūn to Laylī's tent, where he encounters Laylī at a distance and starts to repeat her name in a kind of trance. People throw stones at him and make him leave. This fruitless meeting is followed by a long speech by Majnūn to Laylī, in which he speaks repeatedly of a crime (*jurm*) he has committed, begging Laylī for forgiveness. Majnūn's fettered

See Jāmī, *Siḥ risāla dar taṣawwuf*, ed. I. Afshār, Tehran: Manūchihrī, 1360, p. 110; see also *Tamhīdāt*, p. 109, l. 10; Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, Vol. 6, p. 131, l. 2838.

appearance to Laylī in this scene is, on the one hand, a symbolic gesture to compensate for the crime he might have committed. The nature of the crime is not specified; it may refer either to the public display of his love, or to the fact that he has damaged Laylī's reputation. On the other hand, this meeting is part of the development of Majnūn's character, showing his absolute obedience to his lady. Nizāmī's account reflects the medieval treatment of madmen in public places: throwing stones at madmen was a common phenomenon in Middle Eastern societies. At the same time, Nizāmī implicitly likens Majnūn to a mystic who, by undergoing public censure, purifies his soul and proves the quality of his love. Situations in which people hurl stones at Sufis and humiliate them publicly are common in mystical writings. In *Mir'āt al-ma'ānī*, Jamālī of Delhi tells an anecdote to show how a Sufi is tested in public by throwing stones at him, and accusing him of stealing, murder and fornication.¹⁴¹

The second encounter between the lovers takes place in chapter 52. Here, at Laylī's initiative, an illuminated old man arranges a meeting between the two in a beautiful date-grove near Laylī's encampment. There is no physical contact between the two. Laylī explains the reason for this physical avoidance to the old man:

Since I am glowing in this way, so much like a candle,
 I will be burned if I go one step further.
 I have a husband; although he is asleep,
 this state is not hidden from God.
 Although I have not submitted my heart to my husband,
 I am not such a bastard after all.
 To step beyond this point would be perdition,
 it is a transgression in the religion of love.
 An indecorous speech,
 is better to be left out in a letter
 So that when I come to judge myself,
 I will not be ashamed of myself.
 Even he (Majnūn), who is completely a lover,
 is forbidden to go beyond his intention.
 Ask him to grace me with a few of his poems
 from his sugar-sweet tongue,

¹⁴¹ See chapter 27 of "Mir'āt al-ma'ānī" in *The Mirror of Meanings (Mir'āt al-ma'ānī): a Parallel English-Persian Text*, trans. A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, critical Persian text by N. Pourjavady, Costa Mesa, California: Mazda publishers, 2002, pp. 51–61. See also 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 27. For a discussion on this theme see *infra*, chapter 8:4, pp. 149–59.

That he may bring wine and I may drink it;
 that he may recite poetry and I may listen to him.
 (ll. 66-74)

Here, Laylī points to at least three issues: firstly, she shows her faithfulness to her husband by not approaching Majnūn. Saʿīd Ḥamīdiyān interprets Laylī's avoidance in a mystical sense. In his opinion, this scene is reminiscent of the Prophet's Ascension, accompanied by Gabriel; when they arrived at the place of union, Gabriel refused to set one step further, fearing that God's manifestation (*tajallī*) would burn his wings. Likewise, Laylī fears that Majnūn's appearance would scorch her.¹⁴²

Secondly, she respects religious laws and avoids approaching Majnūn too closely, fearing she may commit an indecorous act. As long as Ibn Salām lives, Laylī does not arrange any serious contact with Majnūn, not only because of her marriage, but also due to her regard for Islamic ethics. She wants her conscience to be clear of any sin. The points referred to by Laylī are somewhat contradictory and are marked signs of the double life she lives. She respects her father and under his command she must live a miserable life with her husband. Being married, she not only has to guard the name of her husband and her father as is required in Bedouin society, but she also has to protect her own name as a married woman. Still, due to her fidelity to Majnūn, she has to keep her virginity, a paradoxical situation raising several ethical questions about her character. According to the Koran (2:223), woman is a field for ploughing, "come to your ploughing as you wish." A married woman who refuses her husband is guilty of *nushūz*, recalcitrance. Likewise, a man who refuses sexual relations with his wife for a long period (*ilāʿ*) breaches his wife's right. Sexual relations are regarded as part of the essence of the marriage contract, and not as a secondary condition.

Thirdly, she avoids breaking the codes of love. Apparently such codes, as perceived by Laylī and by other 'Udhrite lovers, exclude physical contact and satisfaction of one's desire. Although she takes the initiative to meet Majnūn, once the moment of union approaches, she remains at a distance and satisfies herself with Majnūn's poetry. In this way, she partially fulfils Majnūn's desire as well as her own without betraying her husband. In the same way, she does not betray

¹⁴² S. Ḥamīdiyān, *Ārmānshahr-i zībāʿī*, p. 201.

Majnūn, by fighting against Ibn Salām and protecting her virginity.

It remains a point of endless ethical debate as to why she arranges a meeting with Majnūn while still married, and whether she is justified in refusing sexual or even social relations with her husband. It appears that Nizāmī wants to show how the force of love wins over all other laws and how frustrating a loveless marriage is. Laylī relies strongly on her love, a sort of love which should remain pure, and without any selfish and sensual 'intention' (*gharad*).

When Laylī approaches the rendezvous with the illuminated old messenger, Majnūn swoons away as soon as he smells Laylī's sweet scent. The narrator tells us that the messenger weeps when he sees Majnūn in such a condition. By sprinkling his tears on Majnūn he brings him to his senses. Experiencing this extraordinary event, the old man fears that Majnūn may not be able to endure the sight of Laylī's face. This scene is, of course, an allusion to the Koranic story of Moses who asked God to reveal His Face to him. During this union, Majnūn sings a long and beautiful love poem constituting 95 couplets, and then runs to the wilderness. Thus the meeting ends without any dialogue between the lovers.

The lovers' third meeting occurs in chapter 60, in which Laylī takes the initiative to see Majnūn. Here, the narrator explicitly comments on how Laylī seeks for a solution:

She did not desist from seeking a solution;
 she went on searching for a means to recover.
 She sat down in her chamber and gave up resistance;
 she summoned Zayd to her own chamber, saying:
 "Today is not the day of waiting,
 it is the day of longing and union with the beloved.
 Rise, rise, for the world is delightful,
 fetch the sugar and mix it with the rose.
 Make the cypress the bed-mate of the meadow;
 put the jasmine together with the tulip.
 Catch that excellent gazelle in your lasso;
 find that bag of musk,
 So that I make a silken robe from his reed,
 and make ambergris from the dust of his path."

(ll. 17-23)

When Zayd brings Laylī's message to Majnūn, the latter hastens to Laylī's dwelling, singing poetry. Both lovers swoon away on seeing each other. In his other romances, Nizāmī usually includes in such scenes a detailed picture of making love in a garden, but in this

'*Udhri* romance he focuses on the lovers' profound longing, overjoyed feeling and eloquent muteness, resulting in a sudden collapse. Nizāmī depicts the scene of union without a clear reference to sexual behaviour: the lovers touch each other and stay with one another for one night and a day, without any particular intention. Nizāmī concentrates on the lover's chaste and 'unintentional' or 'unselfish love' (*'ishq-i bī-gharaḍ*). He realises the peculiarity of this scene for his courtly Persian audience; therefore he adds several passages to emphasise the mystical nature of the union. Nizāmī starts by referring to the notion of 'unselfish love':

This love for a reality has no selfish intention (*gharaḍ*);
 it is not contaminated by lust and selfish intention.
 It is an utterly perfect love,
 by which the wild and savage beasts are tamed.
 The wild beasts did him (*i.e.* Majnūn) no harm
 because there was no contamination with wildness in him.
 When he eliminated his own wild beast,
 these beasts became his subjects.
 It is clear that the love of those two earthly beings (Laylī and Majnūn),
 does not grow except by purity.
 (ll. 71-5)

The significance of this passage lies in its straightforward delineation of love. Unselfish love is equated with a perfect love. It is a kind of love that is free from lust, corruption and selfish intention. Nizāmī is saying here that physical contact may defile love; this is also the reason why the poet avoids depicting a love-making scene. Majnūn's pure love is also praised in chapter 18:88-91 by the narrator who explains how Majnūn has made his love perfect through gnostic knowledge (*ma'rifa*) and by killing his own wild beast, *i.e.* the 'lower soul' (*nafs*).

What is more, to emphasise the mystical nature of the union, Nizāmī uses mystical letter symbolism to depict the lover's embrace in chapter 60: one of the lovers is identified with the letter *lām* while the other with the letter *alif*, together forming *lā*, meaning 'no.' When written together in cursive script, it is usual to twine these two letters around one another. The word is significant because it is the first word of the profession of faith, and mystics often compare this *lā* to a sword slaying the lovers, or a sea-monster devouring them. As A. Schimmel has pointed out: "The *lām-alif*, though combined of two letters, was often regarded as a single letter and endowed

with special mystical meaning. It is most commonly a metaphor for the closely embracing lovers who are two and one at the same time.¹⁴³ It is this very sword of *lā* that cuts off all of the lover's connections with everything except the beloved:

A *lām* and an *alif* disentangled from bondage;
 by way of union they became *lām* and *alif*.
 Two curved lines, which were running,
 formed a circle around the whole house.
 No bird flies unless it obtains two wings,
 and justice requires a scale of two pans.
 Two candles were burning in a bowl:
 their soul was one and their bodies grew into one too.
 Two threads made up one twisting;
 two goblets were fully filled with one sort of water.
 They closed two openings with one door;
 they became two eyes in one head.
 Separation was separated from the road of the two poles;
 the mirror of the two dawns became one light.
 The two heart-burned lovers intertwined with each other;
 in this way, they spent a day and a night.
 One was out of himself and the other had fled from herself;
 the bird of selfish intention (*gharad*) flew away.
 (ll. 88–96)

After their short union, Majnūn rushes to the wilderness and sings a love poem for Laylī, praising selfless love. Majnūn's justification for his rejection of Laylī is simply to protect love's purity. In his love song, it becomes clear that Majnūn considers love as a unique phenomenon transcending everything including passion, union, and separation. Majnūn practises love for the sake of love and not for the sake of himself or for Laylī. Niẓāmī follows strictly Aḥmad Ghazālī's theory of love. According to Ghazālī, love devours everything including the lover and the beloved.¹⁴⁴ In chapter 60, Majnūn sings a song on love:

Because of the veneration of your [i.e. Laylī] love which gambles all,
 it is a religious obligation for reason to pray for you.
 A love, whose purity is maintained by separation,
 is not a sensual passion but love.
 [This] love is the exalted mirror of light;

¹⁴³ *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 419, also see p. 136.

¹⁴⁴ *Sawānīh*, p. 13, *faṣl* 4, l. 20.

lust is remote from the account of love.
 [When] love is based on [selfish] intentions, it does not last,
 no one approves of love based on selfish intentions.
 How can love agree with such an intention?
 love will depart when selfish intention becomes involved.
 Except you (i.e. Laylī), all other lovers who exist
 are far from you, all worshipping selfish intention.
 Love is this, what is the other one?
 truthfulness is this and the other is interdiction (*ḥarām*).
 Since love finds its way through truthfulness,
 it changes one kindness of the friend into ten.
 When love becomes thus complete,
 it becomes the sign of good reputation.
 (ll. 195–203)

Not only is concupiscence berated, selfish love is also interpreted as sordid and is severely condemned. In fact, although passionate love is prominently present in Nizāmī's romances, friendship and marriage are valued more highly than passion. While Nizāmī characterises his *Laylī and Majnūn* as a real love story, he calls his *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, 'the book of passion' (*hawās-nāma*). The focus in the latter romance is, indeed, on Khusrau's unbridled passion.

9. Conclusions

Taken together, the above analyses provide consistent evidence of various aspects of the relationship between Laylī and Majnūn. Firstly, Nizāmī tries to attune the Bedouin tale to a Persian environment by presenting Majnūn as a kind of prince who falls in love with a beautiful princess. By portraying Laylī with the utmost beauty, Nizāmī breaks with the Arabic anecdotal tradition. She is depicted as an ideal of femininity resembling a fairy, and she enchants Majnūn at the first encounter. By idealising Laylī and by comparing her to supernatural beings, Nizāmī emphasises Majnūn's search for something transcendental.

In the course of the analysis, we have seen that Laylī is not only elevated to the level of a goddess, she is also compared to the Prophet and to the polished heart of the Perfect Man who is a mirror in which God looks at Himself. It has also been established that the arguments of Sa'īdī Sīrjānī and J. Scott Meisami concerning the character of Laylī, and Majnūn's mystical love are not confirmed by

the text. Sa'īdī Sīrjānī overlooks the spiritual elements in the story, and reveals his own aversion to mysticism where he writes that "the 'mystical fabrications' (*'irfān-bāfihā*) at the end of the poem are interpolations."¹⁴⁵ Although he admits that the mystical passages are there in the oldest manuscripts, he ignores them without offering any reason. As we have seen, the mystical elements in this story are not concentrated in one place, as Sa'īdī Sīrjānī suggests, but rather permeate the poem. From the beginning, Nizāmī uses religious vocabulary to describe the character traits of Laylī and Majnūn, comparing their relationship to Khidr and the Fountain of Life, and to the Ka'ba and a pilgrim. While Majnūn is depicted as an ardent pilgrim singing and walking around the Ka'ba of his heart, Laylī is portrayed as the Ka'ba, as the Mirror of the Universe and as the wondrous Cup of Jamshīd (*jām-i Jam*).

Contrary to Sa'īdī Sīrjānī's assertion that Laylī is an utterly submissive character, we have seen that, although she is imprisoned, Laylī is a woman with her own perspective, with a voice, and that she takes initiatives within the restrictions imposed by society. In many respects she is different from Nizāmī's other female protagonists. She is an archetype of the female beloved in the *'Udhrite* romances, embodying the oppression and suffering of women in a patriarchal society. She sheds tears, endures agony, and suffers from loneliness, yet she never abandons the hope of union with Majnūn. She is so loyal and so extremely chaste in her love that even an arranged marriage cannot damage her chastity and fealty. An important aspect worth mentioning here is that by depicting Laylī's psychology in detail, Nizāmī changes the basic plot of the *'Udhrite* love stories in which relatively little or no attention is paid to the emotions of the female beloved. In this way, Nizāmī paves the way for a host of other poets who were to imitate him in the treatment of their female heroines in the following centuries.

By preferring Laylī to the physical Ka'ba at Mecca, Majnūn prefers the inner to the outer, condemns hypocrisy and expresses his sincere commitment to Laylī. By confronting Majnūn with the dilemma of choosing between two directions of prayer, Nizāmī actually condemns those who pray in two directions. Not only in *Laylī and Majnūn*, but also in his other romances, he rejects the possibility that one

¹⁴⁵ Sa'īdī Sīrjānī, *Sīmā-yi du zan*, p. 9.

may have two objects of love. J. Scott Meisami takes Majnūn's prayer to Laylī rather than towards the actual Ka'ba as a "decisive proof of Majnūn's madness," the object of which prayer "is not union, but division."¹⁴⁶ As we have seen above, mystics such as 'Aṭṭār, 'Ayn al-Qudāt and Muḥammad Ghazālī had attached little value to worshipping the house of clay, and concentrated on honouring the Owner of the House. Niẓāmī, and other poets before and after him, see the attributes of God in the character of Laylī. In the Ka'ba scene, Majnūn finds an opportunity to declare both his vehement love and his sincerity towards Laylī. Moreover, by comparing Laylī to the Ka'ba, Niẓāmī universalises Majnūn's beloved so that she is elevated to the level of the divine. She is the direction (*qibla*) towards whom the whole Muslim community performs their daily prayers.

The idealisation of female qualities such as virginity, chastity and purity in Niẓāmī's works reveals Christian influences. These elements are found in *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, in which Khusrau's Christian wife is idealised. In *Laylī and Majnūn*, Laylī is the ageless embodiment of these attributes, an idol beyond man's reach not only for Majnūn but also for other characters.

¹⁴⁶ J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 160.

CHAPTER TWELVE

“YOUR FEET ARE MY CROWN”

1. *Majnūn's parental relation*

Parent-child relations play a significant role in Niẓāmī's epics in general, and in particular in *Laylī and Majnūn*. Here we can find various child-rearing practices which are reflections of the ethical theories on parent-child relations laid down in a wide range of ethico-philosophical books. Therefore, it is worth considering these theories before analysing Majnūn's relationship with his parents. These theories provide us with a yardstick to appraise Majnūn's behaviour towards his parents. Having these theories at our disposal, we can try to answer the following questions: What are the main responsibilities of parents towards their children and vice versa? What are the contents of the child's curriculum? Is it, for instance, the responsibility of Majnūn's father to marry off his son or does Majnūn have a free choice of marriage partner? Is Majnūn's father responsible for Majnūn's behaviour? The same questions can be asked about Laylī, who is forced to marry Ibn Salām.

Islamic scholars were writing treatises on child-rearing as early as the tenth century. Muḥammad Ghazālī devotes several chapters to this topic in his *Ihyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn* and *Kīmīyā-yi sa'ādat*. Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī's *Akhḫāq-i Nāṣirī* and Kay Kāwūs's *Qābūs-nāma* theorise on the parent-child relation at length. The ideas of these influential Iranian thinkers have become prevailing standards in most parts of the Islamic world up to the present day.

The subjects dealt with in such ethical works include the naming of the child, circumcision, clothing, education, the choice of career, freedom of education, choice of a marriage partner, principles of conjugal relations, maintenance of progeny, and practical advice on the problems relating to falling in love. These theories were applied to boys. Little attention was given to the upbringing of girls, or to the child's relationship with the mother. This is partly due to the medieval belief that the woman was inherently the temptress and a threat to man's moral perfection, and partly due to the popular

practice of hiring wet-nurses, which reduced, and in some cases broke, the relationship between mother and child. Medieval men strongly believed in the Galenic idea that good virtues were imbibed through the milk and that sexual intercourse between the parents would trouble the blood and consequently the milk.¹

The Koran provides no injunctions concerning the customs of birth such as circumcision, or on the duty of parents regarding the discipline and training of the child. The child's obligations to his parents, however, are emphatically underlined in the Koran (17:24–5), “(. . .) show kindness to your parents. If either of them attain old age in your dwelling, show them no sign of impatience, nor rebuke them; but speak to them kind words. Treat them with humility and tenderness and say: ‘Lord, be merciful to them. They nursed me when I was an infant.’”

The relationship between the parents and a child is dealt with in the Traditions, and in books on ethics. Ghazālī devotes a whole chapter in both his *Ihyā’* and *Kīmīyā* to the duties of children and their parents to each other.

Know that a child is a trust (*amāna*), entrusted to the hands of parents. The heart of the child is pure like a precious jewel, open to every form like wax. It is without any inscription. And it is pure as the earth; any seed you sow in it, it will grow. If you sow the seed of good, the child will attain the prosperity of the faith as well as of the world. Mother, father and the teacher share the reward. And if it is contrary to what is said, the child is an ill-fated person, and the parents and the tutor share the child's ill fortune. As the Elevated God has said: “Protect yourself and your children against fire (. . .)” (Koran, 66:6). Protecting the child from the fire of the world is prior to his protection from the fire of the hell. To protect the child means to educate him, to teach him proper conduct and to restrain him from evil company, because the basis of all kinds of perverseness originates from evil company.²

And when the child goes to school, he must learn the Koran. Afterwards he must learn traditions (*akhbār*), anecdotes about pious persons, and the conduct of the Prophet's companions and of the ancestors. And he should, of course, be kept away from being involved with poems about love of women and their attributes. And he must be safe-

¹ For a study on the effect of the milk see A. Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999, chapter two, pp. 41–67. We shall return to mother-child relations in paragraph 12:3.

² Muḥammad Ghazālī, *Kīmīyā*, Vol. 2, p. 27.

guarded from a tutor who is of the opinion that with such a curriculum, the child's disposition will be refined intellectually, because he is not a tutor but rather the Satan who is disseminating the seed of corruption in the heart of the child.³

As can be observed, Muḥammad Ghazālī draws the attention of parents to the malleability of the child and how the child should be reared and educated. What is noteworthy in the above passage is that Ghazālī instructs parents to choose a tutor who will not teach the child love poems. A point also referred to by Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī: "(. . .) he (the child) must be kept away from frivolous poetry, with its talk of odes and love and wine-bibbing, such as the poems of Imru' al-Qays and Abū Nuwās."⁴ No reason for this is offered by Ṭūsī or by Ghazālī, except that such poetry leads to moral corruption. Likewise in his chapter on love, Kay Kāwūs advises his son to "resist falling in love," but his motives are totally different from both Ghazālī and Ṭūsī. After a detailed analysis of the process of falling in love, Kay Kāwūs characterises love as an 'infirmity' supporting his view by referring to the ideas of Muḥammad b. Zakarīyā-yi Rāzī, the famous Rhazes (250–313 or 323/854–925 or 935), who propounds various aetiologies of the malady of love in his *Classification of Diseases*.⁵

Apart from learning by heart the Koran, traditions, and stories of the wise, Ṭūsī adds that the child should eventually learn sciences, "beginning with the science of Ethics and proceeding to the science of Speculative Philosophy."⁶ The reason for this is to prove to the child the soundness of what he has been taught "without any act of voluntary choice" during his childhood. Both Ghazālī and Ṭūsī consider the child as a *tabula rasa*, who has no knowledge of good and evil, and can be moulded to every form. Ṭūsī states: "Once his (the baby's) suckling is complete, one must concern oneself with the discipline and training of his character before destructive dispositions gain a hold: for the infant is apt, and inclines the more to reprehensible dispositions by virtue of the deficiency and the need in his nature."⁷ Like Ghazālī and Ṭūsī, Kay Kāwūs gives special attention

³ Ibid., p. 28; see also *Ihyā'*, Vol. 3, pp. 62–64.

⁴ Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, London: George Allen, 1964, p. 168.

⁵ Kay Kāwūs, *Qābūs-nāma*, p. 82.

⁶ *The Nasirean Ethics*, p. 171.

⁷ Ibid., p. 167.

to naming the child.⁸ Ṭūsī starts his chapter on the "Chastisement and Regulation of Children" with the following remark: "When a child comes into the world, one must begin by bestowing on him a fine name; for if an inappropriate name be given to him, he will be sick at heart on that account his whole life long."⁹ Kay Kāwūs notes that name-giving is one of the "claims which children have upon their fathers" and parents are responsible for the name they give to their children.¹⁰

The choice of career for boys is extensively discussed by Ṭūsī and Kay Kāwūs. Boys have a free choice of career and can choose whatever craft they wish. The tutor should teach with eagerness and love his own occupation. It is preferred that the father considers the child's nature before he allows the child to choose a craft. Ṭūsī advises fathers not to force their children to a particular craft, explaining that someone who wishes to learn the craft of secretaryship, "he must make an intensive study of calligraphy and polished discourse, and he must memorise treatises, orations, proverbs, poems, anecdotes, dialogues, elegant stories and witty novelties, while at the same time learning the keeping of accounts and the other literary sciences."¹¹ Once a boy has learned a craft and can earn his livelihood, Ṭūsī notes that he should seek a wife and "be set up for a separate home."¹²

As far as the choice of marriage partner for boys is concerned, Kay Kāwūs believes that the father should seek a wife for his son provided that the latter is "capable of having charge of a household, and that the father knows that the child can carry out a task and (that) he can earn something by doing so."¹³ He goes on: "But if you realize that your son is unworthy, without capacity to be the head of a household and lacking the power to succeed, do not cast a Muslim into unhappiness, for each will suffer misery at the hand of the other."¹⁴

In the same way that parents are bound to bring up their chil-

⁸ For Ghazālī's view on name giving see *Ihyā'*, Vol. 2, p. 194.

⁹ *The Nasirean Ethics*, p. 166.

¹⁰ See *Qābūs-nāma*, p. 132; I have consulted the English translation by R. Levy, *A Mirror for Princes*, London: Cresset Press, 1951, p. 119.

¹¹ *The Nasirean Ethics*, p. 171.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹³ *Qābūs-nāma*, p. 135, English trans., p. 124.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 136, English trans., p. 125.

dren according to certain precepts and principles, the child has to fulfil a number of obligations as well. In the *Qābūs-nāma*, Kay Kāwūs names several responsibilities of a child to his parents.¹⁵ He tells his son that it is God's will that he have children, so that the world may continue to thrive. He also notes that the child should revere his parents and that he should not think that his birth was merely the result of sexual enjoyment. Parents are regarded as intermediary agents between the child and the Creator. Therefore, the child should honour his parents in the same way that he holds the Creator in honour. According to Kay Kāwūs, this is because God is the cause of the existence of everything and the parents are the cause of the child's existence. Kay Kāwūs compares the relationship between parents and children to a tree and its fruits; "the greater the care you give to the tree, the better will be the fruit."¹⁶ Kay Kāwūs relates this metaphor to the parents' prayers for the well-being of their children. Thus, by holding parents in great honour, the child will receive God's favour. Ṭūsī follows the same line as Kay Kāwūs, stating that "nothing should take precedence over observance of the rights of parents."¹⁷ In his view, parents have a right to three things: firstly, sincere love, which is to please them in word and deed by veneration, obedience, service, softness of speech, and humility. Secondly, to assistance in all their needs, seeking nothing in return. Thirdly, children should display a kindly attitude towards their parents both privately and publicly.

2. *Majnūn and his father*

The parent-child relationship is one of the favoured topics in Persian epics.¹⁸ In what follows, we will consider the father-child relationships in Niẓāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn*, demonstrating how Niẓāmī uses theories of up-bringing as rules to be observed by both parents and children. There are four main lines of paternal power in *Laylī and Majnūn*: Niẓāmī and his fourteen year old son Muḥammad; Shirwānshāh

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 24–26; English trans., pp. 19–21.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 25, English trans., p. 20.

¹⁷ *The Nasirean Ethics*, p. 179.

¹⁸ For a detailed study of father and son relation in Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma* see D. Davis, *Epic and Sedition*, chapter 3, pp. 97–166.

Akhsitān and his son Manūchihr; Laylī and her father; and Majnūn and his father Sayyid-i ‘Āmirī. A fifth example, providing a metaphor of paternal power, can be detected in the relationship between Majnūn and a deer (33:26). The first two relationships take place outside the story proper and are subordinated to the third and the fourth. Nizāmī’s relationship to his son is depicted in chapter eleven of the introduction. In this chapter, we see a father who is, on the one hand, kind and concerned, and on the other, firm and determined. Based on his own experience, Nizāmī counsels his son on various aspects of life. He advises his son to gather knowledge, to acquire virtue and dignity, to know himself, to maintain the cause of good fortune (*daulat-ṭalabī*), to be polite to people, not to rely on his father’s fame, to fear God, to avoid a life of thoughtlessness, and to seek an occupation which will not bring him embarrassment, eschewing the profession of a poet in favour of a career which is profitable in both this world and the hereafter. Furthermore, Nizāmī advises his son to become either a lawyer (*faqīh*) or a physician (*ṭabīb*) or to undertake both professions. However, he forewarns his son:

Be a lawyer who concentrates on the worship of God
and not a lawyer who teaches deception.
Be a physician as capable as Jesus,
not a physician who ends man’s life.
(ll. 22–3)

In whatever profession his son engages, he must learn it in a profound and penetrating fashion, even if it is the making of saddles for donkeys: “Better to become a pack-saddle maker, in accordance with the limits of one’s talents/than to be a clumsy hat-maker.” (l. 26)

The relationship between Shirwānshāh and his son, Manūchihr, is mentioned in chapter eight. Nizāmī advises the king’s son to read Firdausī’s *Shāh-nāma* and to remember the pithy sayings of the wise. Nizāmī overtly refers to the didactic aspect of his poem. He promises the prince that in his poem there is a “treasure concealed in a casket.” He considers the poem as his daughter, a beautiful maiden, whom he presents to the royal family. He adds that even if the prince does not have any regard for her father, he might look with kindness on her brother, that is, on Nizāmī’s son. In this subtle way, Nizāmī not only entrusts his son to prince Manūchihr, he also draws the prince’s attention to the poem’s didactic nature. Perhaps Nizāmī hoped that both the Shāh and his son would learn from various parent-child relationships in the poem.

The relationship between Laylī and her father is superficial. There is no direct encounter between the two. Laylī's father is depicted as a cruel, obdurate and deceitful figure who intentionally leaves the desire of his daughter unfulfilled by betrothing her to Ibn Salām. In this way, he robs Laylī of her love and happiness. From Laylī's father's point of view, his decision is fully justified. He protects his daughter by rejecting Majnūn, whom he considers to be a madman.¹⁹

In contrast to Laylī's father, Sayyid-i 'Āmirī is kind, gentle and generous. He never refuses his son anything and, at each encounter, he patiently listens to his son, and weeps for him. He advises Majnūn until the last moment of his life. Niẓāmī depicts his hesitant nature so tangibly that some Niẓāmīan scholars such as J.E. Bertel's take him to be the "cause of Qays's death." Bertel's says: "Had he ('Āmirī) behaved resolutely, he would perhaps have been able to avert the catastrophe."²⁰

Majnūn holds his parents in high esteem. Each time that Majnūn meets his father or mother, he kneels before them, gives his excuses for his unusual behaviour and begs them for forgiveness and blessing. The relationship between 'Āmirī and Majnūn is very special. 'Āmirī acts as Majnūn's affectionate friend. His love for Majnūn, which in Bertel's view leads to an excessive permissiveness, is partly because he had been childless, and partly because he feels himself responsible for making Majnūn a victim of his own excessive desire (*tama'*) for a son. As Niẓāmī has emphasised, this desire was contrary to an acceptance of what God had decreed in the 'best interest' (*maṣlaḥa*) of His creatures. Instances of an intense love between father and his long-awaited son abound in both polite and folk-literature of Persia. One of the most representative examples from folk-literature is king Marzbān and his son Khurshīdshāh represented in the *Samak 'Ayyār*.²¹ The love of Marzbānshāh for his son is prevalent in this long narrative and has a tremendous influence on the plot. Another example of an intense love between father and son is the story of Jacob and his son Joseph. These two Biblical figures, referred to in the Koran, have become a literary commonplace in Persian love poetry. Poets dwell frequently on Jacob's weeping for

¹⁹ See *supra*, chapter 11:8, pp. 294-96.

²⁰ J.E. Bertel's *Niẓāmī: Tvorcheskij put poeta*, p. 152.

²¹ See Farāmarz b. Khudādād b. 'Abdullāh al-Kātib al-Arrajānī, *Samak 'Ayyār*, ed. P. Nātil Khānlari.

his child, which eventually made him blind. Only by inhaling the scent of Joseph's cloth could Jacob's eyesight be restored. The well of Kan'ān, in which Joseph was left, is commonly used as a metaphor for the perils on the path of the lover. To disobey one's father meant to have the same fate as Kan'ān, the rebellious and disobedient son of Noah.²² Niẓāmī compares (chapter 39, l. 2) the love between Majnūn and his father to Jacob and Joseph: "That old man, who had lost his son to the wind/was like Ya'qūb cut off from Yūsuf." Majnūn himself is likened to Joseph in chapter 52:17, in the words of an enlightened old messenger: "The old man said out of love: 'O Moon (Laylī), Yūsuf has fallen into the pit, without you.'"²³ Majnūn's father deeply sympathises with his son, cherishing him as his own liver, heart, and eye.

In addition to their journey to the Ka'ba, there are two encounters between Majnūn and his father. The first is in chapter 20:

When Majnūn saw his father's dignity,
 he rolled at his father's feet like a shadow, saying:
 "O, crown of my head and throne of my soul,
 accept my excuse, for I am weak.
 Look at me but do not ask about my state;
 leave my care to destiny.
 How can I let your eyes
 look at me with such a burning on this day?
 I am ashamed that you have come here;
 how can I excuse myself?
 You well know how the course of destiny goes:
 the end of the cord [of destiny] is beyond the reach of our hands."
 (ll. 61-6)

In the next chapter, 'Āmirī advises Majnūn. Niẓāmī compares Majnūn's father to the birds at dawn, bemoaning the lot of his son. His bright day is turned into a dark night. From the beginning of the story, 'Āmirī looks for solutions and considers everything which might have caused his son's love-sickness. He sees Majnūn as a restless (*bīqarār*), and immature (*khām-kār*) person. 'Āmirī advises him to be patient and to use his reason (*ra'y*). According to 'Āmirī, Majnūn's love-sickness could derive from three main sources: the evil eye

²² For the account of Noah and his son see the Koran (11:42-6).

²³ Other comparisons between Majnūn and Yūsuf appear in chapters 33:48-50 and 14:1-7.

(*chashm-i bad*); people's curses; and being culpable for someone's blood. Despite these, he gives hope to Majnūn and tells him not to give up hope of finding a way out. 'Āmirī repeatedly asks Majnūn to give up his life style, because it has led to nothing save disgrace for himself, his family and the whole tribe. Being the chief of the clan, 'Āmirī holds himself responsible for the good name of his people.

'Āmirī advises his son by referring to patience (*ṣabr*); to *daula*, which can mean affluence, felicity or a good turn of fortune; and to reason (*ra'y*). He explains to his son that "to be impatient is a serious flaw" and tells him to examine himself to find out what has happened to him:

Be not without hope of finding a way out,
for there is no wonder if a seed sprouts.
When you lose the hope for something,
that same thing may be the cause of hopefulness.
There is much hope in hopelessness;
the end of the dark night is brightness.
(ll. 25-7)

Afterwards, he advises his son to have patience:

Undoubtedly, if you remain patient by means of fortitude,
good fortune will gradually turn up for you.
The ocean, which has such a vast face,
is the refinery of the river's drops.
And the high mountains, which are crowded by clouds,
are accumulations of little particles of dust.
Beware, do not let your patience weaken;
it is by perseverance that one finds the pearl.
(ll. 32-5)

Then, he asks Majnūn to see reason and to rely on his intellect: "Grow not into a man without reason, for a man devoid of reason/is like a worm, devoid of feet." (l. 36)

Just as Laylī's father tries to convince his daughter that Majnūn is the cause of her dishonour, Majnūn's father blames Laylī for having driven his son mad. He initially tries to persuade Majnūn to marry another girl and forget Laylī. Although he blames Laylī, 'Āmirī gives his son full freedom to choose a marriage partner. His conduct is, of course, in sharp contrast to Laylī's father, who ruthlessly represses his daughter's will. 'Āmirī reminds Majnūn that it is through his use of Laylī's name that people learn about his madness and reproach him:

Why would you give your heart to someone,
who won't remember you in years?

She is like a rose (*gul*) without you, while you are stuck in the mud
(*gil*);

Her heart is as hard as a stone, while you hold the stone of patience
on your heart.

If you speak not with people about her,
they will not detect your ignominy.

(ll. 38–40)

In chapter 23, Majnūn answers his father with an anecdote about a partridge and an ant, to illustrate his reason for weeping and suffering on the path of love, rather than laughing in any other path.²⁴ The partridge picks up the ant and torments it with affliction. The ant bursts into laughter, and says: "O partridge, can you do this?" The surprised partridge imitates the ant and starts to laugh, exclaiming: "I am the one who should laugh and not you." In doing so, he lets the ant fall and the ant runs to safety. By telling this anecdote, Majnūn is advocating the tenets of 'the Weepers' (*Bakkā'ūn*), and presenting himself as a Weeper, as a lover who constantly sheds tears.

The Weepers were ascetics of the third/ninth century who constantly shed tears for their own shortcomings and the pathetic state of the world. Moreover, the *malāmatī* Sufis were originally called 'grievers' (*maḥzūnūn*) and 'sorrow' (*ḥuzn*) was one of their principle tenets.²⁵ Their practice was so extreme that in some cases it is reported that the stream of tears left deep furrows on their cheeks. Laughter was denounced. They justified their austere practice by reference to the Koran 9:82: "They shall laugh but little and shed many tears." They also used Prophetic traditions such as: "If you knew what I know ye would laugh little and weep much," or, "God loves every sorrowful heart," or "I (God) am with those whose hearts are broken for My sake."²⁶ Mystics praised sorrow and believed that a heart that

²⁴ Also see my article "Insects in Classical Persian Literature: The Case of the Ant" in *Persica*, No. 16, 2000, pp. 109–44.

²⁵ For this aspect of mystics see N. Pūrjawādī, "Manbā'ī kuhan dar bāb-i malāmatīyān-i Nayshābūr" in *Ma'ārif*, Vol. 15, No. 1 & 2, November 1998, pp. 16–18.

²⁶ For the *Bakkā'ūn*, their movement, ideology and historical relation to Christianity see F. Meier in *El*, s.v. *Bakkā'*; also consult A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 31, 190; J.E. Bertel's *Tasawwuf wa adabīyāt-i tasawwuf*, pp. 30–1; for the formation of the Weepers as a Sufi order see J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 270.

had no sorrow could turn to destruction. There are diverse reasons for weeping: fear of God, Day of Judgement, compassion for people who err in their religion, and longing to return to the spiritual abode.

As 'Ayn al-Qudāt has said, a true lover is always in an agonising state, whether he sees the beloved or not.²⁷ Husayn Nāgaurī names several reasons for the tears of the lover: weeping while being in love comes from the haughtiness of the lower soul; weeping in solitude (*khalwa*) is for comfort, and weeping in companionship with the other mystic lovers reveals their burning.²⁸ The tears may also be due to the beloved's death. The lover's weeping may also result from his desire to blind himself: by being blinded, the lover abandons all hopes of seeing the beloved and frees himself from the obsession of union. Sometimes the lover weeps because he is afraid of casting a glance on her: he fears to injure the fair beloved with his piercing glance.

Censure for laughter and praise for weeping appear numerous times in Nizāmī's work. In *Khusrau and Shīrīn* (94:58), he mentions Plato's constant weeping, and in *Makhzan al-asrār*, a section is devoted to the reproach of laughter and the praise of weeping.²⁹ In *Laylī and Majnūn*, in the episode of the old woman who chains Majnūn and walks with him in towns (chapter 35:29), some people laugh and others cry. Here, the narrator intervenes and states: "Those who were thoughtless (*ghāfil*) laughed while those who had intellect (*āqil*) wept." In his answer to 'Āmirī, Majnūn explains that sorrow and weeping are essential ingredients of love. In fact, love-theorists such as Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawadī have presented sorrow as the younger brother of love.³⁰ Rūzbihān Baqlī notes that the portion of the one in love is nothing but sorrow.³¹ Majnūn offers two reasons for his weeping: he fears to be scorched by fire; and he is afraid that if he laughs, the 'affliction' (i.e. love) may flee from his heart. The fire is not specified: it might allude to Hell-fire or to the fire of love. In

²⁷ *Tamhīdāt*, p. 106; to be in a constant state of grief is expressed repeatedly in mystical writings; cf. *Nuzhat al-majālis*, (1366) p. 240, (1375) p. 282, q. 1021; the famous mystic woman, Rābi'a al-'Adawīyya had always been in a state of weeping, see 'Attār, *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 72.

²⁸ *Lawā'ih*, pp. 57-8.

²⁹ *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 159.

³⁰ *Mū'nis al-'ushshāq*, p. 269.

³¹ *Sharh-i shathīyyāt*, pp. 51-2.

the latter sense, the fire fits the image of love as lightning, scourging lovers, a metaphor occurring several times in the poem and also used in other works on love.³² Sorrow is often identified in love poetry with both fire and water: the fire burns the lover to ashes, the water, an allusion to tears, extinguishes the fire and drowns the lover.³³

When 'Āmirī hears his son's readiness for self-sacrifice, he retreats into a corner and weeps. In this scene, 'Āmirī succeeds eventually in persuading Majnūn to return home. However it is no more than two or three days before Majnūn again flees from the inhabited world. In fact, when he is among people, he loses his tranquillity and leads such a life that everyone sympathises with him: "For two or three days he lived in torment/so that anyone who saw him would cry. (l. 22)

The second encounter between Majnūn and his father takes place in chapter 39. Here, we see an age-stricken, feeble and desperate father who is determined to use all possible means to persuade his son to see reason. After a long search, Majnūn's father and his two companions meet a stranger in the desert who tells them where they may find Majnūn. When they find him, Majnūn fails to recognise his own father:

Majnūn said: "Who are you and what do you want from me?

O, you whose slave I am, where do you come from?"

'Āmirī replied: "I am your father; on this very day,

I am searching for you with a heart which is burning as deep as my liver."

When Majnūn found out who he was,

he fell at his feet and burst into tears.

(ll. 32-5)

'Āmirī advises Majnūn, giving him his dying words. He reminds Majnūn of the world's uncertainties and of negative aspects of alienation and exile:

Escape from this path whose plants are sharp thorns;

escape, because the escape is in your best interests. (. . .)

The cruel Wheel has shot an arrow,

publicly shedding your blood.

³² Najm ad-Dīn Dāya, in his *Risāla-yi 'aql u 'ishq* compares love to fire and reason to water. See the edition of T. Tafaddulī, Tehran: Bungāh-i Tarjuma, 1345, pp. 61-2.

³³ *Nuzhat al-majālis*, (1366) p. 472, (1375) p. 532, q. 2974.

It will chase you closely for two or three days,
making you fall [out of exhaustion] and when you die, it will take you
away.

All the wild beasts from lion to wolf
will fill their stomachs from the carcass.
It is better to be the dog of one's own alley,
than to experience the disdain of exile.

(ll. 44, 46-9)

‘Āmirī condemns Majnūn’s self-imposed anguish of mind and bodily pain. He regards suffering as contrary to reason, comparing it to natural disasters such as earthquakes and torrents. In his view, Majnūn is vainly resisting the tyranny of Fate, which he himself has bitterly experienced:

It is not reasonable to suffer pain;
how can anyone endure suffering?
Look how a river, which is the bed of water,
becomes destroyed by a flood.
And look at a mountain, while it resists the flood,
it may fall into pieces by an earthquake.
with the way that suffering is tormenting you,
you would wear out, even if you were made of iron.

(ll. 51-4)

‘Āmirī instructs his son to deceive himself by contriving a lie. Since there is no certainty in this world, one should delude oneself in order to live one’s life:

Grow patient, firm and tolerant;
deceive yourself with a little lie.
Be happy by means of an uncertain thought, though it is like the wind;
there are many wise men who are happy with uncertainty.
Whether the uncertainty be a lie or the truth,
it can adorn your affairs for a while.

(ll. 59-61)

Before answering the advice ‘Āmirī has given in chapter 39, Majnūn pays the familiar homage to his father in chapter 40. From line 30 onwards, instead of answering his father, Majnūn advises his father. He pays no heed to ‘Āmirī’s advice and instead instructs him what to do; the roles of the advisor and the advised are reversed:

Do not take plants from this field (*i.e.* world);
imagine that the dust of the road (Majnūn) fell into the Void.
Leave out a letter from the genealogy, you have read;
think that you do not have a descendant.

Dig a grave and put your hand upon the gravestone;
 think that he died as a drunken lover. (. . .)
 You said that the night of journey is near;
 but this lost one (Majnūn) is on his own journey.
 Since your journey is my autumn,
 I know my time, but not yours.
 The living people will shed tears for your death;
 I am dead, what can a dead man do?
 (ll. 30-2, 34-6)

We see that Majnūn is the one who is highly aware of the world's fleeting nature. When 'Āmirī reminds Majnūn that he, 'Āmirī, is about to begin the journey of death, Majnūn replies that he has embarked on his journey before his father.

The speculative and didactic conversation between father and the son is continued in chapter 41. Here, when 'Āmirī sees Majnūn's steadfastness, he gives up hope of his recuperation and fully realises that his son is "entrapped in the world of love." 'Āmirī's last wish is to embrace his son and to perform the ritual ablution before beginning his journey using Majnūn's tears:

Although you are as dear as my eye,
 farewell, for you will never see me again.
 Farewell, for I have set out for my journey;
 I go, but not by a way that I can return along.
 Farewell, for intimacy has vanished between us;
 I am late and the caravan has gone.
 (ll. 12-4)

'Āmirī's death is followed by a long passage, totalling 51 couplets, in which the narrator describes the world's transience and tells the reader how he should live. In the following chapter, when Majnūn hears the news of his father's death, he rushes mournfully to his grave and faints upon it. When he recovers his senses, he composes an elegy while weeping.

3. *Majnūn and his mother*

The relationship between Majnūn and his mother is depicted in chiaroscuro. There is only one encounter between the two. Even in the early scene in which Majnūn is born, there is no mention of her, and we never learn her name. When Majnūn is born, he is entrusted to a wet-nurse. Generally speaking, the role of the mother

in the birth and early up-bringing of a child is pushed to the background in romantic *mathnawīs*. In Nizāmī's *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, there is no mention of Khusrau's mother, and the hero is given to a wet-nurse.³⁴ Likewise in *Haft paykar*, Bahrām's mother is absent, and Bahrām is sent abroad at birth to be trained there. The surprising absence of mothers at children's births in romantic *mathnawīs* reaches its climax in Jāmī's *Salamān and Absāl*. Not only is the woman severely condemned as the source of concupiscence, the poet presents a physician who contrives a dazzling scientific procedure by which he produces a child without the intervention of a woman.³⁵ In Waḥshī Bāfiqī's *Nāzīr and Manzūr*, when the childless king and his vizier receive magical fruits from a mystic so that they can have children, they rush to the court and 'plant new dates in order to harvest new fruit' (10:38). The only reference to the mothers comes when the newborn children are given to wet-nurses, and "due to the separation from those soul-enlivening lips (of the babies) // the mothers' breasts were in mourning" (10:48).³⁶ In almost the same way, in Jāmī's *Mihr and Māh*, the king of Badakhshān goes to a cave to visit a mystic who helps him to have children. Likewise, in Khājū of Kirmān's *Humā and Humāyūn* and *Gul and Naurūz*, the names of the mothers of the heroes are not mentioned. Immediately after their births, the children are given to wet-nurses.

The absence of the mother and her limited role in these romances is actually a formula used by the romantic poet to make an allegorical figure from a real social phenomenon. The character of the mother in these stories is replaced with that of a wet-nurse (*dāya*) who fulfils a number of tasks in literary texts. This allegorical figure is often portrayed on the basis of gnostic ideas personifying the four elements (water, fire, wind and earth) as 'fourfold mothers' (*ummahāt-i arba'a*). While these constitute the female generative agents, the 'heavenly fathers' (*ābā'-i 'uluwī*) are the nine heavens and mankind is their child.³⁷ For instance, in *Humā and Humāyūn*, the mother of Humā is presented as the four ancient elements and his father as the nine heavens:

³⁴ *Khusrau u Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwatyān, chapter 13.

³⁵ See 'Abd ar-Rahmān Jāmī, *Mathnawī haft aurang*, p. 331.

³⁶ '(...) breasts in mourning' is an analogy comparing the flow of milk with the shedding of tears.

³⁷ References to the earth and the creatures upon it as children can be found in many Persian texts. See Rūdakī, *Dīwān*, p. 44, l. 377; cf. *Sharh-i gulshan-i rāz*, p. 469. For a discussion on this subject consult F. Meier, *Die Fawā'id*, pp. 67-75; De Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, p. 276.

"From these four mothers and from those nine fathers/a baby boy was born to him (*i.e.* the king) by the [divine] decree (*qaḍā*)."³⁸

There are some exceptions however. In Gurgānī's romance, *Wīs and Rāmīn*, the process of the pregnancy of Shahrū, the mother of the heroine, is detailed and the plot of the story revolves actually around Shahrū's promise to king Maubad: during a royal festivity in the spring, king Maubad sees Shahrū and becomes attracted to her. Being old, Shahrū says to the king that she is not a good match for him, promising that if she ever bears a girl, she will marry her to the king. As soon as Wīs is born, she is entrusted to wet-nurses, who immediately take the child to the city of Khwuzān.³⁹ Shahrū's role in the story is limited, apart from giving birth to Wīs and her promise to Maubad. In addition, in both the romantic and heroic stories of the *Shāh-nāma*, the details of confinement, the practice of using wet-nurses, and of sending the child away for up-bringing are prominent. The appearance of the mother and the description of her qualities in heroic epics can be taken as an emphasis on the child's noble descent. The noble origin of the child is of such paramount importance that the hero-child is often the result of a consanguineous marriage. Instances of such marriages abound in heroic stories: Dārāb is begotten as a result of intercourse between king Ardashīr and his daughter Humāy.⁴⁰

Before considering Majnūn's relationship with his mother, we should first outline three aspects of the social context of mother-child relationships: relating to breast-feeding, the practice of hiring a wet-nurse (*dāya*), and beliefs about the effect of the milk on the child's constitution.⁴¹ It would also be helpful to briefly consider the responsibilities of mothers towards their children as expounded in ethical textbooks on child-rearing. Surprisingly, maternal responsibilities are not mentioned in Ṭūsī's, Kay Kāwūs', or Ghazālī's books. These consider only the motives for taking a wife and to the responsibilities of a good wife.⁴² The wife's responsibilities are towards her husband, who is responsible for arranging for the child's breast-feeding and

³⁸ Khājū Kirmānī, *Humā u Humāyūn* in *Khamsa*, p. 284, l. 463.

³⁹ *Wīs u Rāmīn*, p. 28, chapter 11, l. 17.

⁴⁰ For a study on the consanguineous marriages in Persia see B. Spooner "Iranian Kinship and Marriage" in *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, Vol. 4, 1966, pp. 51-9.

⁴¹ A. Giladi, *Infant*, pp. 43-4, 50-51.

⁴² See *The Nasirean Ethics*, pp. 161-66.

training. The Koran (65:6; 2:233) does not indicate whether the father or mother is responsible for deciding whether a child is to be nursed by the mother, or by a wet-nurse. Commenting on verse 2:233, Fakhr ad-Dīn Rāzī gives the choice to the mother.⁴³ In his mystical commentary on the Koran, *Kashf al-asrār*, Maybudī suggests that both parents should consult on the matter of the child's suckling and taking a wet-nurse.⁴⁴ But Kay Kāwūs considers that the father should entrust the child to "intelligent and affectionate nurses."⁴⁵ Likewise Ṭūsī emphasises: "A nurse must be chosen, who is neither stupid nor diseased, for bad customs and most diseases are transmitted through the milk from the nurse to the child."⁴⁶ Muḥammad Ghazālī says: "The woman who gives suck to the baby must be good-tempered, and consume licit foods, and be well-intentioned, because ill-temper communicates through the wet-nurse."⁴⁷ The influence of the wet-nurse and her milk on the infant was so important that Ibn Sīnā devoted an entire chapter to this subject in his *Canon of Medicine*.⁴⁸ According to him, a wet-nurse should be aged between 25 and 35, have a strong body, good personal habits and character, firm nipples, and good quality of milk. Ibn Sīnā elaborates on each of these requisites in great detail.

The practice of hiring wet-nurses brought religious and moral complications in relation to orthodox Islamic tenets. In a number of cases, love relationships were kindled between the nursing woman and the man who, in his childhood, was suckled by her. Such relationships occurred so frequently in Persian romantic poems that we can speak of a specific genre. One of the earliest such relationships is in Gurgānī's *Wīs and Rāmīn*, in which Rāmīn and his notorious *dāya* strike up an intimate relationship for a short interval. The most famous example is of course Jāmī's *Salamān and Absāl*, in which the

⁴³ See M. & T. Omidshahar in *ELI*, under *Dāya*. On the views of breast-feeding in the Koran and in Koran commentaries see A. Giladi, *Infants*, pp. 13-22, for a discussion on the Koran verse 2:233 see pp. 17-19.

⁴⁴ See *Kashf al-asrār*, Vol. 1, abridged version made by Ḥ. Āmūzgār, Tehran: Iqbāl, 1373, p. 96.

⁴⁵ *Qābūs-nāma*, p. 132, English trans., p. 120.

⁴⁶ *The Nasirean Ethics*, pp. 166-67.

⁴⁷ *Kimiyā*, Vol. 2, p. 27.

⁴⁸ See Ibn Sīnā, *A Treatise on the Canon of Medicine of Avicenna*, Trans. O.C. Gruner, London: Luzac, 1930. pp. 366-67; also consult Ḥakīm Maysarī, *Dānish-nāma*, pp. 163-65, ll. 2683-2705.

prince Salamān falls in love with his beautiful nurse Absāl. In addition, the passionate love relationships between Yūsuf and Zulaykhā, the wife of Potiphar, and Siyāwush and Sūdāba may also be included into this category, although neither of the female lovers suckle their beloved. The writers of romantic *mathnawīs* totally ignored the Koranic prohibition (4:23) against marriage or sexual intercourse with one's wet-nurse.

The use of a wet-nurse was an upper-class custom originating in pre-Islamic Persia. As early as Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma*, we see that heroes such as Zāl, Rustam and Siyāwush were all suckled by wet-nurses, either human females or other mammals. Zāl was feed by the legendary bird, Sīmurgh, and Farīdūn by a cow. The practice of suckling by female mammals also occurs among the Achaemenid kings: Cyrus, for instance, was suckled by a bitch and Xerxes by a mare. Rustam, the elephant-bodied hero of the *Shāh-nāma* was suckled by no less than ten nurses.⁴⁹

In both the romantic and heroic stories of the *Shāh-nāma*, the practice of employing wet-nurses and the sending away of the child for an austere up-bringing are prominently present. In almost all romantic *mathnawīs*, as in both the heroic and romantic episodes of the *Shāh-nāma*, the hero-child is entrusted to one or more wet-nurses, who in some cases take the child away from his parents for a strict upbringing. The custom of 'fostering out' the child was common amongst the Persians. Ṭūsī refers to this system of sending the child out in the following words: "It was a practice among the kings of Persia not to have their children reared among retainers and servants, but to send them away with trustworthy persons, so that they should grow up used to hard living, to rough fare and clothing, and averse to luxury and splendour."⁵⁰ This practice is reflected not only in Gurgānī's *Wīs and Rāmīn*, in which both lovers are brought up by a wet-nurse far from their birth-place, but also in Nizāmī's *Haft paykar*. The hero of this historico-romantic poem, the Sasanian king Bahrām Gūr, is famed for his artistic and shrewd capacities, which are the result of strict rules of upbringing employed by his guardian. As soon as Bahrām was born, his father, Yazdgird I, entrusted him to Nu'mān who takes him to Arabia and teaches him various arts.

⁴⁹ Firdausī, *Shāh-nāma*, Vol. 1, p. 241: "Ten wet-nurses continually gave milk to Rustam/for the milk constitutes both the power of man and his essence."

⁵⁰ *The Nasirean Ethics*, p. 172.

The main reason for this practice in the pre-Islamic and medieval period was the quality of the milk. The temperament and spiritual qualities of the nurse were thought to be imbibed through the milk, as Galen had taught. Men believed that the humours of the mother's body would change after confinement, and her milk was therefore considered to be harmful for the baby. Ibn Sīnā suggests that the wet-nurse should be barred from sexual intercourse while nursing. Likewise, according to Zoroastrians, intercourse with a woman quick with child was forbidden, "whether the milk has already come to her breast or has not yet come".⁵¹ In Tarsūsī's *Dārāb-nāma*, when the milk drops from Humāy's breast on seeing her son, the learned Raushanwad explains:

The elevated Almighty has created in women two veins which join their liver to their breasts. At the moment that the sperm is separated from the father and has trickled in the mother's womb, it turns into blood and by the power of the Truth the Elevated, it receives a form. The mother's liver becomes brimmed with blood until the time of confinement. The majestic and glorious God removes the red colour from the blood and makes it white so that the mother can suckle the child and that the child can grow. If perchance, one day the child would act against decorum, his mother may say: "aren't you ashamed, your mother has nurtured you through the blood of her liver."⁵²

Men believed in the lasting effect of the milk, and this was elaborated in various ethical textbooks and romantic epics alike. Thus in the same way that Nizāmī's Majnūn insisted: "This secret (love) entered my body with the milk and it will leave my body with my soul" (18:85), the philosopher Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī states: "The nature that enters the body with the milk leaves it only when the soul does!"⁵³

The belief in milk as a medium communicating the qualities of the nurse to the child was so strong that the blessings (*karāmāt*) of certain mystics were believed to be the result of the milk of the nursing woman. Thus 'Aṭṭār in his hagiography describes the effect of the milk of Ḥasan of Baṣra's wet-nurse:

While his mother was busy with some work, Ḥasan began to cry. Umm Salama put her breast into his mouth to let him suckle. He

⁵¹ C. Elgood, *A Medical History of Persia and the Eastern Caliphate*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951, p. 8.

⁵² *Dārāb-nāma*, Vol. 1, pp. 28-9.

⁵³ *The Nasirean Ethics*, p. 167.

suckled some drops of her milk; the thousands of blessings that the Truth caused to appear in Ḥasan were all traces of Umm Salama's milk.⁵⁴

The strong belief in the effect of the milk became so popular in Sufi circles that mystics such as Najm ad-Din Rāzī and Rūzbihān Baqlī devised numerous metaphors inspired by the milk, the breast and the wet-nurse. The former even received the eponymous epithet of Dāya, the 'Wet-nurse'.⁵⁵

In addition to the belief in the ability of the nurse's milk to transmit her qualities, and the 'fostering out' of children of the court, Ibn Sīnā suggests several reasons for taking a wet-nurse: if the mother is weak, if her milk is not considered good, or if it is too thin.⁵⁶ Other reasons such as an inadequate volume of milk, social prestige, the desire to retain the sexual attractiveness of the shape of breasts and nipples, and the husband's wish to monopolise his wife's attention, can be suggested, but a systematic investigation would be beyond the scope of the present research.

In Niẓāmī's *Laylī and Majnūn*, Majnūn's father employs wet-nurses for him as soon as he is born. These wet-nurses are not identified, but Time is also his nurse:

'Āmirī ordered that he (Majnūn) should be entrusted to wet-nurses,
so that he would grow by drinking milk.
Time (*daurān*) nurtured him by way of wet-nursing,
nurtured him with the milk of affection.
Whatever milk trickled on Majnūn's lip
a letter of fidelity was inscribed on it.
Whatever feeding they gave him,
they sowed the seeds of friendship in his heart.

⁵⁴ 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 29; the story is also told in *Sharḥ at-ta'arruf*, Vol. 1, pp. 200-01. Gurgānī refers to the negative influences of impure milk in *Wīs u Rāmīn*, p. 104, ll. 80-2.

⁵⁵ Proverbs and imageries relating to the wet-nurse and the effects of milk abound in Persian. See 'A.A. Dihkhudā, *Lughat-nāma*, under the headings Dāya, Dāyagān, Dāyagānī and Dāyagī. See also J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, p. 30. Although a full-time paid wet-nurse would only be affordable for the relatively wealthy, wet-nursing was and is a widespread Iranian practice, for various reasons. A sickly boy may be taken to one or more healthy women to be breast-fed several times, in the belief that this will restore the child's constitution. A girl-child may also be suckled the requisite number of times (15 feedings) in order to create a milk-relationship between relatives of the child and relatives of the wet-nurse, where this is convenient.

⁵⁶ *The Canon of Medicine*, p. 366.

Whatever blue line they drew on his face,
 they inspired in him the enchantment of a heart.
 Majnūn's tulip-like mouth was washed with milk;
 like the petals of a jasmine, he grew through the milk.
 He was like nectar in milk, you would say,
 or a moon laid in the middle of a cradle.⁵⁷
 When two weeks of this month had elapsed,
 he turned into a full moon.⁵⁸

(ll. 33-40)

By appointing 'time' or 'destiny' as Majnūn's wet-nurse, Nizāmī creates a new dimension, a fatalistic anticipation of the impact of the otherworldly powers over man's frail position in this world.

Although Majnūn's mother plays a limited role in Majnūn's birth, breast-feeding and upbringing, they seem to have a close relationship. When his uncle visits Majnūn, he urges Majnūn to meet his mother. When they meet later, Majnūn's mother warmly invites him to return home, in one of the poem's most touching scenes. Majnūn's old mother, who is bent with sorrow, sees her son:

When his mother saw Majnūn from a distance,
 she detected that his condition had altered.
 She saw that her red rose had become yellowish pale,
 that her mirror was covered with a layer of rust.
 [Seeing this] the limbs of her body broke into pieces;
 she writhed in her limbs.
 Now she began to wash Majnūn's face with her tears;
 then she combed the knots in his hair.
 She caressed him with love from top to toe,
 while he ailed painfully because of each swelling.
 She moved her hand on every part of his body,
 now rubbing his blisters, then bandaging his inflammations.
 Now washing his head and body from dust,
 then plucking thorns from his feet.

(ll. 29-35)

Afterwards, she begs Majnūn to return home but Majnūn refuses, saying:

⁵⁷ The metaphor of the moon and the cradle refers to Majnūn, who is as bright as the moon and is lying in the cradle of the night.

⁵⁸ In this distich, Nizāmī makes a pun on the word *māh*, signifying both the 'moon' and 'month.' When Majnūn was 14 days old, he was as bright as the shining moon.

O you whose feet are my crown;
 the secretion from your shell is my pearl.⁵⁹
 I have harvested your purest seed;
 the earth at your door is my gate to Paradise.
 If there is no way for me to return to reason,
 you know that I am not to be blamed.
 If my condition has turned out to be so bad,
 it was not brought about by myself.
 How can our effort have any benefit?
 this situation befell us, and it had to happen.
 For a thousand times this situation has befallen me,
 but this time, no solution can be found for my problem.
 You know that a love with such affliction and lamentation,
 is not according to one's free choice (*ikhtiyār*).
 (ll. 50-6)

After these words, Majnūn falls at his mother's feet and kisses her as a gesture of respect and apology. Weeping, his mother bids farewell to her son and returns home, where she passes away soon after and is buried beside her husband.

In their dialogue, Majnūn reveals the reasons for some of his decisions and actions which had not been put into words up to this point. He says that his parental home is like a cage for him, that he is determined to free his soul from the body. He reminds his mother that one has no power of free choice in matters of love and that he is not to be blamed, repeating what he had told his father about free will. The appearance of Majnūn's mother at the end of the poem not only shows the hero's awareness of his duties towards his mother, it also expresses the marginal role of mother-child relationship in this romance.

Majnūn tries to win his mother's blessings, referring to proverbs such as 'Paradise is under the feet of the mother,' meaning, 'by satisfying your mother's heart, you gain Paradise.' If parents disinherit their child, or declare him disobedient and curse him, it is said that he will not find salvation in either this world or the next. Being aware of this belief, Majnūn treats his parents with the utmost respect and seeks their blessing at each encounter. Respect for one's parents is so important in Iranian culture that it is second only to duty to the Creator.

Although Majnūn's relation to his father is formal and deferen-

⁵⁹ In the second hemistich, Majnūn is saying that his essence derives from her.

tial, they treat each other affectionately and with respect, as friends. In comparison to the standards for child-rearing laid down in ethical books, 'Āmirī is very permissive to Majnūn, eventually leading to absolute autonomy. Such permissiveness and the affectionate relationship might dispose the reader to blame 'Āmirī as a possible cause for Majnūn's wretched existence. But 'Āmirī gives Majnūn a fine name, Qays, a favourite name among the Arabs, provided him with a proper education and taught him how he should act towards other people. He leaves Majnūn to choose his own spouse, and does not forcefully interfere with Majnūn's choice. From the beginning to the end of their relationship, 'Āmirī patiently offers Majnūn advice, trying to persuade him to live a 'normal' life. He never orders Majnūn to do anything, but cajoles his son. Moreover, like Kay Kāwūs, 'Āmirī advises Majnūn to avoid love and instead occupy himself with some occupation and so pass his life. He suggests to Majnūn that he should marry some other girl.

One of the most conspicuous aspects of the relationship between Majnūn and his father is the sharp contrast between their world-views. Whereas 'Āmirī is represented as a person who seeks a serene and peaceful life, evading as far as possible ontological and speculative issues, Majnūn rebels against the tyranny of Fate and laments man's impotence and frailties. Not only does he abandon the inhabited world, including his parents and close friends, he also relinquishes his own ego. His ideas and the way these ideas are expressed are reminiscent of the sayings of great mystics. Majnūn considers himself as a traveller and the world as a caravanserai. He can indeed be regarded as a representation of a mystic in pursuit of spiritual ambition.

There are also similarities between father and son. They both act to oppose their fate at a certain moment of their lives, but later give in to invincible Fate. 'Āmirī is not satisfied with his childlessness, and tries to alter his fate through prayers and by distributing alms. The result is catastrophic not only for himself, but also for his son, his family and his tribe. Likewise, Majnūn initially revolts against his fate, but when he becomes aware of his own frailties in relation to the heavenly powers, he surrenders. They both hate violence and try to avoid it. 'Āmirī's desire to obtain a child, and Majnūn's wish to unite with Laylī are both catastrophic at the phenomenal level.

The absence of Majnūn's mother at the beginning of the story is partly due to the social practice of wet-nursing, which also appears in many other romantic and heroic epics, and partly due to 'Āmirī's

strong desire for a son, which requires an emphasis on the father and his desire. In many romantic stories, it is the husband who desires to have a child, preferably a son.

4. *Majnūn's relation to Laylī's father*

Generally speaking, in 'Udhrite poetry the relationship between the male lover and the kinsmen of the female beloved is antagonistic, to the point that the kinsmen may shed the blood of the lover with impunity. Often the father of the girl is the main obstacle; he may either ask for a fortune as a bride-price or may reject the lover because of his low social rank or, as in the case of Majnūn, because of his mental derangement. One of the best examples in which the girl's father rejects the lover by asking for a large amount of money is 'Ayyūqī's *Warqa and Gulshāh*, in which Gulshāh's father refuses to accept Warqa's marriage proposal by paradoxically stating: "I have no better bridegroom than Warqa/but there is nothing but the wind in his hand." When Warqa persists, Gulshāh's father advises him to go to his uncle, the king of Yemen, and to ask him for money, and he promises not to marry Gulshāh to anyone else. Meanwhile, the king of Syria, who has heard of Gulshāh's beauty, is determined to marry her. He arrives at Gulshāh's dwelling with riches beyond measure to persuade Gulshāh's father to let him marry his daughter. Amazed by this untold wealth, Gulshāh's father hands her over to the king, without asking his daughter's opinion and without any regard for his solemn promise to Warqa. Like other 'Udhrite female lovers, Gulshāh lives an unfulfilled life, constantly crying and complaining. She is highly aware of domination by men who cruelly disregard her feelings: "Because of my pearl, they gave me to a stranger/without enquiring about my consent and contentedness."⁶⁰ 'Ayyūqī refers to the fortune the imposed husband brings, explicitly mentioning that Gulshāh did not see any of it. After all, without her beloved, "pearls were just stones for her."⁶¹ In fact, not asking the daughter's agreement to her marriage undermines the relationship between the father and daughter in 'Udhrite love-stories.

⁶⁰ 'Ayyūqī, *Warqa u Gulshāh*, p. 115.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 116.

In *Laylī and Majnūn*, the relationship between Majnūn and Laylī's father is full of hostility, accusation and deception. Laylī's father plays a key role in the entire poem and is the principal barrier on Majnūn's road to union with Laylī. He is depicted as an intractable, cunning and hated figure; his name is not even mentioned. Although he is given only three short speeches in the entire poem, what he says bears such a weight that he alters the course of the story each time. In fact, the sad tale of Laylī and Majnūn would not have existed at all if Laylī's father had consented to give his daughter's hand to Majnūn.

There is no direct encounter between Majnūn and Laylī's father. Laylī's father appears for the first time in chapter seventeen, where Majnūn's father asks the hand of Laylī for his son, and he answers:

This saying is not in its place,
while you are saying this, heaven is doing its work.
Although I see your speech is glancing,
how can I sit on piercing fire?
Although a certain amount of friendship is involved,
its harmful intention is a hundred thousands fold.
Although your child is a charming person,
his wilfulness (*khud-kām*) is inauspicious.
He always shows insanity;
a madman is not suitable to be our associate.
First seek assistance through prayer
then you can speak of fidelity
Unless he becomes intrinsically sound
you need not speak of this again.
One cannot purchase a jewel which has a crack,
a false pearl cannot be threaded.

(ll. 40-7)

Laylī's father is the first character in the story who explicitly brings up the issue of Majnūn's madness and wilfulness (*khud-kāmī*), a word which may also mean obstinacy, gratifying one's own desire or selfishness. He rejects the marriage proposal and suggests that Majnūn's father should pray for the recovery of his son. He refers to how Majnūn has disgraced the name of Laylī, her family and her clan, and then reminds Majnūn's father of the Arabs' critical nature: "You do know how fault-finding the Arabs are. What would they say, if I agree to this proposal?"

Laylī's father reappears in chapter 31, in which he again forbids a marriage between Laylī and Majnūn. He belittles Majnūn by calling

him an 'unchivalrous man' (*nājawān-mard*), a demon, a frenzied man and a dog. He continues to say that Majnūn is as destructive as fire, that he has no future, that he is deranged and that he has disgraced not only his own name but also the name of Laylī. He would rather let his daughter be eaten by dogs than be married to a "foreign demon." In this scene, Laylī's father reminds Naufal of the 'ill-repute' (*bad-nāmī*) Majnūn has brought upon Laylī and her whole tribe. He puts Naufal into a dilemma by stating:

If you put my bridle in his hand,
my name will be disgraced for ever. (. . .)
Do not think to disgrace my name,
observe this day, and fear that Day (of Judgement)
(ll. 56, 58)

Afterwards, Laylī's father displays his abhorrence for Majnūn:

I will cut off the head of that bride who resembles the moon
and will throw it to the dogs on the road,
So that I may be released from her disgrace,
and be freed from war and peace for the sake of her.
If this be the case, it would be better that my child
be devoured by a dog than by this human demon.
He who is bitten by a dangerous dog,
should have no fear because there is a remedy for it.
(However) he who is wounded by the tongue of man,
cannot be healed by a thousand remedies.
(ll. 61 5)

The last couplets are not only used to convince Naufal of Majnūn's offence, they also show how seriously Laylī's father takes the threat of *bad-nāmī*. According to Laylī's father, Majnūn has disgraced the name of Laylī and her tribe and nothing can ever compensate for his crime. In chapter 36, after his tirade to Naufal, Laylī's father cheerfully hurries to Laylī and tells her that there will be no union between Majnūn and her because he has cunningly persuaded Naufal to go away: "Today I have designed such a trick/to be released from the plague of that roused one." (l. 6) After persuading Naufal, Laylī's father immediately gives her in marriage to the rich Ibn Salām, and he himself disappears from the poem.

Laylī's father is certainly the main catalyst for the separation between Laylī and Majnūn. He does everything in his power to avoid giving his daughter's hand to Majnūn: even if he has to lie and deceive people. The most important cause of the enmity between

Majnūn and Laylī's father is that they have two completely different opinions about *bad-nāmī*. Whereas *bad-nāmī* and blame (*malāma*) are two indispensable aspects of the sort of love that Majnūn practises, these are taken by Laylī's father as serious violations of the tribal laws. The anthologist Jamāl Khalīl Shirwānī devoted a section to "Bad Name" in his *Nuzhat al-majālis*.⁶² The lover longs to be dishonoured and to receive a bad name, so that he can prove his utter devotion to the beloved.

Moreover, Majnūn's *khud-kāmī*, which is brought up by Laylī's father, is related to *bad-nāmī*: the two often appear together in poetry.⁶³ The pursuit of one's own desire often turns into a more hazardous kind of love, with dangers and difficulties. At this point the lover gambles everything, including his good repute, to satisfy his desire.

Like other fathers in 'Udhrite love-stories, Laylī's father wants to marry his daughter to a rich man like Ibn Salām. She is a source of income for her father. Majnūn himself is materially very rich, since he is the heir to his father's immense wealth. However he severs himself from materialism and strictly follows the path of love. When Majnūn's father brings his marriage proposal and many riches to Laylī's father, Majnūn has already dishonoured the name of Laylī by making a public display of his love. In fact, Laylī's father brings up different excuses to reject Majnūn at each proposal, depending on the situation. During his conversation with 'Āmirī, Laylī's father does not refer to the issue of *bad-nāmī* and points only to Majnūn's insanity. However, knowing that a good reputation is important for the chivalrous Naufal, Laylī's father cunningly emphasises that Majnūn has dishonoured Laylī's name. He also warns Naufal that Majnūn even may damage Naufal's good name.

⁶² *Nuzhat al-majālis*, (1366), pp. 470-71, (1375) pp. 530-31, qq. 2957-965.

⁶³ See, for instance, Ḥāfiẓ: *hama kāram zi khud-kāmī ba bad-nāmī kashīd ākhīr/nahān kay mānad ān rāzī kazū sāzand mahfilhā*, "My whole affair is now turned from obstinacy into bad name/how can a secret remain hidden when it gathers people together." Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīwān*, p. 18, gh. 1, l. 6.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

OF LOVE, CHIVALRY AND WAR

*walīkan hawā chūn ba ghāyat risad
shawad dūstī sar ba sar dushmanī*

*But when passion reaches its apogee
friendship turns entirely into enmity.¹*

Majnūn's relationship with the chivalrous Naufal

Before focusing on Majnūn's relationship with the chivalrous chieftain Naufal, it will be helpful to briefly consider the background of Majnūn's chivalry and his chivalrous love. The term *jawān-mardī*, 'chivalry' or 'courtesy,' translated into Arabic as *futuwwa*, is an essential trait of the lover.² The term is difficult to define because it covers several virtues in ethical, mystical, religious and social fields.³ The first practitioners of *jawān-mardī* were the members of craft guild organisations.⁴ Although the institution with its convoluted and secularly codified norms predates Islam, it was intermingled with Islamic mystical doctrines as early as the ninth century. Early mystical theorists such as 'Abd ar-Rahmān as-Sulamī of Nayshābūr (330–412/942–1021) and Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, and their followers in later centuries, devoted special chapters to chivalry. In the thirteenth century, Najm ad-Dīn Dāya considered *futuwwa* as the tenth station of the Sufi

¹ *Sawānīh*, p. 19, *faṣl* 5, l. 10.

² For an elaborate study on this term see Franz Taeschner *Zünfte und Bruderschaften im Islam: Texte zur Geschichte der Futuwwa*, Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1979; idem, in *EL*, under *Futuwwa* and Cl. Cahen in *EL*, in the same article. See also S.M. Dāmādī, *Ṣāliḥ b. Janāh's Kitāb al-adab wa-al-muruwwa*, Tehran: Pazhuhishgāh, 1373. For a possible Persian origin of *jawān-mardān* see M. Zakeri, *Sasanian Soldiers*. H. Riyāḍī, *Āyāt-i husn wa 'ishq*, Vol. I, pp. 119–21. See also M.J. Mahjūb, "Spiritual Chivalry and Early Persian Sufism" in *Classical Persian Sufism*, pp. 549–81; 'A.H. Zarrīnkūb, *Arzish-i mirāth-i Sufiyya*, pp. 169–70.

³ See Dāmādī, *Ṣāliḥ*, pp. 62–108. See also F. Taeschner, *Zünfte und*, pp. 27–40. The authors present the views of several prominent mystics about *futuwwa*.

⁴ W.L. Hanaway, in *ELr*, under 'Ayyār II and Cl. Cahen, in *ELr*, under 'Ayyār I.

path.⁵ The qualities of *jāwān-mardī* mixed with the concept of 'blame' (*malāma*) and they were treated by as-Sulamī and Hujwīrī as twin concepts.⁶

In Persian love poetry, the appellation of *jāwān-mard* is usually used to refer to the lover, who despite the cruelty of the beloved and the pangs of separation, still behaves courteously and fearlessly.⁷ The lover's chivalry lies in his endurance of public reproach, humiliation and disgrace. "Love is not warranted for *nāmardān*," for 'not chivalrous men,' stresses 'Ayn al-Quḍāt.⁸ Aḥmad Ghazālī says that to set out on love's journey is easy, but to end the journey one must be a *jāwān-mard*.⁹ Najm ad-Dīn Dāya declares that the *sharbat* ('sherbet') of loverhood suits only the chivalrous and the unchivalrous cannot partake of this drink.¹⁰ Not everyone can practise love, only those who possess 'manliness' (*mardānagī*) can embark on love's journey because the path of love is full of perils and threats. Inexperienced lovers, or to use a technical term, 'the raw ones' (*khāmān*) should not risk their lives for love. Since the fire of love consumes the lover, he should have the attribute of *mardānagī*. As Sa'dī says: "You are not a salamander, do not flutter around the fire/because first manliness is required and then the encounter."¹¹ The heart of the lover should be chivalrous: the mystic often challenges the heart to choose the path of plague (*āfāt*) and to settle in the corner of a 'tavern' (*kharābāt*, lit. 'ruined place') rather than sitting in the Ka'ba like a helpless woman.¹²

Manliness requires a number of virtues which the lover should possess. These include: to live like a dervish, renouncing all worldly interest; to grow blameworthy by receiving a bad name; to become homeless; to live as an exile; to gamble everything including his head for the beloved; absolute fealty to pacts even if they turn out to be

⁵ "The *morid* must be chivalrous, granting [each] his due rights so far as he is able, without expecting his own rights from anyone." See *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, part 3, chapter 11, p. 260; Engl. trans. p. 262.

⁶ See, for instance, Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, pp. 69-78, 228.

⁷ For the use of *jāwān-mard* as the beloved see Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, pp. 256-57.

⁸ *Nāmahā*, p. 22.

⁹ *Rasāla-yi 'ayniyya* in *Majmū'a-yi āthār*, ed. A. Mujāhid, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tehran, 1358, p. 234.

¹⁰ *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, p. 385; English trans. 374.

¹¹ *Būstān*, ed. Gh. Yūsufi, Tehran: Khārazmī, 1375, p. 112.

¹² *Nuzhat al-majālīs*, (1366) p. 119, (1375) p. 154, q. 100.

injurious to one's own interest; extreme altruism; to relinquish concupiscence (*hawā*),¹³ to be patient and endure the pain of separation and the beloved's oppression and, above all, to be possessed by the 'demon' of love (*diwāna-yi 'ishq*). As we shall presently see, mystically minded poets such as Niẓāmī used their portrayals of a lover to show the ideal character of a chivalrous lover.

The most prominent archetypal figures known as to *jawān-mard* in Sufism were Majnūn and Iblīs. Ḥusayn Manṣūr Ḥallāj was perhaps the first mystic who called Iblīs (Satan) a chivalrous man because of his constancy, and his endurance of the Beloved's separation and oppression. 'Ayn al-Qudāt also calls Iblīs a *jawān-mard*, alluding to his constancy in his works.¹⁴ Pointing at Iblīs' endurance and the Beloved's eternal curse, 'Ayn al-Qudāt says:

Iblīs says: While other people run away from a slap in the face, we received it on the nape of our neck. (. . .) It makes no difference whether one receives honey or poison, sugar or colocynth, grace or wrath from the hand of the beloved. He who is in love with grace or with affection, is in love with himself and not with the beloved.¹⁵

'Ayn al-Qudāt adds: "Alas Iblīs was asked: 'Why don't you throw the black mantel of damnation from your shoulders?' He answered: 'I will never sell the mantel, I will never sell, because if I sell it, my shoulders will be naked.'"¹⁶ With such anecdotes, mystics show that the lover should willingly accept the beloved's curse and oppression. They sympathise with Iblīs and weep with him for the pain of his separation.¹⁷ Like Iblīs, Majnūn is also a genuine prototype of *jawān-mardī*. Iblīs sacrificed his thousands of years of prayer and his special position as the 'angel of propinquity' (*malak-i muqarrab*), for the sake of his love of God.¹⁸ Likewise, Majnūn sacrifices everything including

¹³ Zayd-i Tūsī, calls Yūsuf *jawān-mard* because he forsakes *hawā*. See *Tafsīr-i sūra Yūsuf: jāmi' as-sittīn li-laṭā'if al-basā'īn*, ed. M. Raushan, Tehran: Bungāh-i Tarjuma, 1357, chapter 34.

¹⁴ *Tamhīdat*, p. 284, ll. 9-10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 224, ll. 1-2, 6-8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224, ll. 9-11.

¹⁷ *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 406.

¹⁸ 'Ayn al-Qudāt tells the complaint of Iblīs in the following way in *Tamhīdat*, p. 225 (the translation is taken from A.J. Arberry's *A Sufi Martyr*, p. 101): "For so many thousands of years I attended diligently the street of the beloved. When he accepted me, my portion from him was rejection. When His mercy came upon me, He cursed me saying, "Upon thee shall rest My curse, till the Day of Doom" (The Koran, 38:87).

his life. He prefers to live in pain and separation rather than to take a beloved other than Laylī. Like Iblīs, Majnūn takes every insult and curse from Laylī's family as if it were the beloved's grace.

Like his 'Udhrite counterparts, Majnūn's love is chivalrous, which means that qualities such as altruism and enduring the pain of separation are at times more important than love itself. Sometimes, when the chaste lover is required to choose between union with his beloved and chivalry, he chooses the latter. The best example of chivalrous love relationships in Persian are in 'Ayyūqī's *Warqa and Gulshāh*. Chivalry is reflected in the character of Warqa and the Syrian king. The latter marries Gulshāh by buying her from her father and becomes Warqa's rival. Towards the end of the poem, when Warqa learns that his beloved is still alive and is residing in the palace of the Syrian king, he sets out for Syria. On the way he is attacked by bandits and is wounded. By chance, the Syrian king passes by, sees the wounded Warqa without recognising him, and decides to take care of him. When Warqa learns that the king is his rival, he valiantly shuns union with his beloved, a goal for which he has fought all his life. Warqa's reaction shows his loyalty to the king. Warqa's loyalty goes so far, that even when the king asks him to take Gulshāh, he does not accept this generous offer and chooses separation, dying later in isolation. Such an extreme loyalty, however, raises a number of moral issues. Although Warqa knows that Gulshāh is living like a prisoner in the palace and that she has avoided sleeping with the king, he does not accept the king's offer, which would mean Gulshāh's release. Warqa places the king's interest before his own interests, but also Gulshāh's interests. Warqa's arguable altruism is one of the virtues of chivalry recurring in various forms in Persian literature both secular and spiritual.

Nizāmī, with his affinities with the community of *akhīs*,¹⁹ explores various aspects of chivalry in his romances, and particularly in *Laylī and Majnūn*. In *Khusrau and Shīrīn* the lover's chivalry is accentuated: when Khusrau sees the naked Shīrīn bathing in a brook, he looks in the other direction out of *jawān-mardī* and continues on his way.²⁰ Majnūn's chivalrous traits are stressed throughout the poem, especially in his relationship with Naufal and the chapters following his

¹⁹ For Akhī's see F. Taeschner, in *EL*, under Akhī.

²⁰ *Khusrau u Shīrīn*, ed. B. Tharwatyān, p. 193, l. 70.

farewell to this chivalrous chieftain. Not only is Majnūn called *jawān-mard* by various characters, such as the enlightened old messenger, he himself speaks as a chevalier. The sort of love he is practising is not something to be accomplished by everyone, it demands manliness.

In *Laylī and Majnūn*, Nizāmī presents two types of chivalry through the characters of Majnūn and the courteous Naufal. While Majnūn strictly follows a spiritual chivalry, largely ignoring its social tenets, Naufal can be taken as a paradigm of social gallantry. Although Majnūn and Naufal are initially able to associate with one another smoothly, in the end Majnūn chooses his own path because Naufal disappoints him. By means of the break in Majnūn and Naufal's friendship, Nizāmī shows the difference between chivalry on the path of love and social chivalry: the former cleaves tightly to the ideals of love, making no compromise with social and mundane norms, whereas the latter is bound to social conventions.

The earliest account of the encounter between Majnūn and Naufal occurs in Ibn Qutayba's *Kilāb ash-shi'r*, in which Naufal is identified with a historical figure named Naufal b. Musāḥiq (d. 87/706), a tax-collector from the district of Medina. There is no emphasis on Naufal's chivalry, although his offer of help might be regarded as a benevolent deed. In Ibn Qutayba's account, when Naufal sees the destitute Majnūn, he shows his sympathy by asking: "Is it love that has brought you to this state?" "Yes" said Majnūn, "and it will bring me to a worse state than this." Naufal asked: "Would you like me to help you marry her (Laylī)?"²¹ Majnūn answers: "Yes" and Naufal promises to unite him with Laylī. However, when Naufal realises that he cannot persuade Laylī's family, he advises Majnūn to go away, adding: "Your departure is easier for me than bloodshed."²²

Nizāmī, in contrast, devotes five consecutive chapters, 325 couplets in all, to depicting their relationship from various perspectives. Although Nizāmī retains the primitive Bedouin atmosphere, he changes several elements for his Persian aristocratic audience. According to R. Gelpke, "the encounters of small Arabic raiding parties become gigantic battles of royal Persian armies and most of the Bedouins talk like the heroes, courtiers and savants of the refined Iranian

²¹ See A.E. Khairallah, *Love, madness*, p. 137.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

civilisations.”²³ Indeed, Naufal with his retinue appears as a young and mighty Iranian prince on a hunting expedition. Nizāmī’s main alteration of the source story is that he transforms the cursory outline of Naufal into an Iranian chevalier and prince, of the type that abounds in Firdausī’s *Shāh-nāma* and other Persian heroic romances. Naufal is introduced with a series of antithetical attributes: although his heart is as soft as wax, his body is as hard as steel. Naufal is not presented as a tax-collector, as in the Arabic sources, but rather as an embodiment of *jawān-mardī*, who mirrors almost all of its ideals. Yet when he is confronted with the complex character of Majnūn, who is a genuine spiritual *jawān-mard*, Naufal paradoxically fails to fulfil his promise. As we shall shortly see, Nizāmī uses Naufal’s failure to question the norms of social and courtly chivalry.

The relationship between Majnūn and Naufal starts when Naufal chances to see Majnūn in a ravine on a mountain. He decides to unite him with Laylī. Naufal’s willingness to help Majnūn is ambiguous: on the one hand, being a *jawān-mard*, he feels obliged to help an utterly destitute man like Majnūn; on the other hand, he sees Majnūn as a prey he has caught during his hunting excursion. In his conversation with Majnūn and with other characters, Naufal uses the terminology of hunting and of chivalry. He speaks with Majnūn about Laylī as if she is a prey chased by Majnūn. For instance, when Naufal’s eye falls on Majnūn, he says to himself: “I was looking for a prey/bravo, bravo, what a quarry have I chased.” (l. 33) In their first encounter, Naufal wins Majnūn’s heart by promising to unite him with Laylī either by force or gold:

I will put her on an equal scale with you
by gold or by the strength of my arms.
If she were a bird, flying in the air,
my own hands would catch her nape.
If she were like a spark in a stone,
like the iron, I would bring the spark out and close to hand.
Unless that moon becomes your spouse,
I will not remove my lasso from her.
(ll. 47–50)

Despite Naufal’s firm oath, Majnūn shows some scepticism towards him from the outset. Perhaps he senses that social conventions of

²³ R. Gelpke *Nizami Leila und Madschnun: der berühmteste Liebesroman des Morgenlandes*, Zürich: Manesse Verlag, 1963, p. 325. My quotation is taken from Peter J. Chelkowski in *Mirror of the Invisible World*, p. 67.

chivalry may fall short of the conventions of spiritual love. He fears that Naufal may forsake him before he has fulfilled his promise:

I am afraid that you may let me down
in the midst of the time that you are helping me,
that before the prey has been drawn into the net,
you may forsake me and leave me with my affair.

(ll. 59–60)

Harbouring suspicions, Majnūn cleverly asks Naufal to take an oath, a fundamental aspect of *jawān-mardī*, which obliges the chevalier to fulfil his promise at any cost. In the last chapter of the *Qābūs-nāma*, Kay Kāwūs deals with “The rules of practising *jawān-mard-pīshagī*,” in which he stresses that steadfastness in one’s promise is one of the prerequisites of chivalry. According to Kay Kāwūs, the essence of *jawān-mardī* lies in three things: “fulfilment of your every promise, adherence to the truth both in word and deed, and the habit of endurance.”²⁴ Majnūn says to Naufal:

If you take an oath for what you have said,
your reward will be my acceptance.
And if the source of this discourse is a mirage,
reward yourself, and leave me alone,
So that I maintain my own occupation,
to stand up and to pursue my activity.

(ll. 62–4)

Confronted with Majnūn’s lack of faith in him, the gallant Naufal is compelled to take an oath. In return, Naufal asks Majnūn to stop wandering the desert and isolating himself from people. Majnūn responds positively and takes a bath, wears clothes and becomes calm and reasonable. But the flaw in Naufal’s character is shown at the very beginning: whereas Majnūn leaves his hermit-like lifestyle as he has promised, Naufal forgets his oath and does not take any action for about three months, until Majnūn reminds him of his promise in a long passage in chapter 28. Apparently Naufal fails to understand Majnūn’s situation.

Confronted with Majnūn’s reproach, Naufal tries to win the hand of Laylī but he fails, and a bloody fight ensues between the two parties. Waging a war as a way of winning the beloved is one of the aspects of ‘*Udhrite*’ love. The earliest Persian example is ‘Ayyūqī’s

²⁴ *Qābūs-nāma*, p. 246; English trans., p. 243.

Warqa and Gulshah in which almost 500 couplets are devoted to the battle between Warqa and his rival Rabi' b. 'Adnān.²⁵ What is striking in the battle-scene in *Laylī and Majnūn* is that Majnūn participates in the war and that he sings a "prayer for peace" in the middle of the fight, regretting that Naufal has started a war. Majnūn's unexpected behaviour, which results from his feeling of being responsible for the bloodshed, confuses Naufal's army. When Majnūn repents and decides to compensate, his actions are taken by Laylī's party as a sign of madness too. He confuses Naufal's army even more when he takes the side of the enemy, kissing their hands and nursing their wounds. When one of Naufal's soldiers asks him: "O *jawān-mard*, we are offering our lives for your sake, why are you helping the foe?"²⁶ Majnūn's response is typical, reflecting a type of codes of mystical love and of chivalry which should justify his action:

Since the enemy is my beloved,
 what have I to do with the sword?
 While one can fight against the enemy
 how can one battle against the beloved? (. . .)
 When the beloved sends the scent of life,
 the lover will send the same in return.
 She sends collyrium made from my dust;
 how can I dare to throw stones? (. . .)
 The other side holds the hand of the beloved,
 how can anyone leave the side of the beloved?
 The inclination of my affectionate heart is there;
 where my heart is, there is also my soul.
 It is a duty to die before the beloved,
 that she asks my life and that I entrust it to her.
 When I offer my life in this way,
 how can I pity your lives?
 (ll. 53-4, 56-7, 59-62)

Majnūn's words have such an effect that when the warrior hears him, he bursts into tears and goes away. Majnūn's avoidance of

²⁵ In this poem, even the beloved Gulshāh joins the combat, disguised in men's clothes, and kills Rabi'. In Khājū Kirmānī's *Humāy and Humāyūn* too, the beloved woman disguises herself as a man and takes part in the battle. Disguising oneself as the opposite sex is one of the aspects of *'ayyārī*, and it occurs frequently in Persian love romances. Nizāmī's Shīrīn also journeys during the night in disguise. M.J. Mahjūb has analysed this aspect of *'ayyārī* in Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma*. See "Rawishhā-yi 'Ayyārī wa nufūdh-i kār wa kirdār-i 'Ayyārān dar Shāh-nāma" in *Firdausī wa Shāh-nāma*, ed. 'A. Dihbāshī, Tehran: Mudabbir, 1370, pp. 485-520.

²⁶ Chapter 29:52.

fighting against Laylī's tribe, his kissing the hands of the enemy who are killing Naufal's soldiers and his nursing the wounds of Laylī's army may at first sight be interpreted as a sign of his insanity. However, on a close inspection of the conventions of mystical love, and the codes of *jawān-mardī*, we see that Majnūn's actions are fully justified. From a mystical point of view, Majnūn presents himself as a true *malāmatī* mystic, who daringly faces difficult tasks, and for whom "good and evil repute, praise and blame, rejection and acceptance are the same."²⁷ Ibn 'Arabī says that chevaliers are students of *malāmatīs*, the "most perfect of the gnostics."²⁸ Majnūn's public revelation of his love for Laylī, which makes him an object of reproach, is a clear sign of Majnūn's perfect love. In this respect, Majnūn resembles many mystical lovers such as the famous Shaykh San'ān who was smitten by love for a Christian girl. The most artistic version of this love-story is related by 'Aṭṭār in his masterpiece *Mantiq at-ṭayr*.²⁹ In this story, Shaykh San'ān, a pious spiritual leader, who has spent fifty years of his life in a cloister near the Ka'ba, falls in love with a charming Christian girl and bids farewell to his religious aspiration for her sake, becoming the object of his disciples' blame. The Christian girl humiliates him by ordering him to burn the Koran, to become an idolater, to drink wine and to work in the pigsty. He openly accepts this sore degradation for the moment of union. When the Shaykh's followers look for a solution by consulting an old disciple of the Shaykh, he severely rebukes them and reminds them of one of the essential aspects of love: "The fundament

²⁷ Dāya, *Mirṣād al-ṣibād*, p. 261; English trans., pp. 263–64.

²⁸ See W.C. Chittick, *Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of the Imagination*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 272.

²⁹ Stories of this kind are scarce in Islamic literature. Apart from Shaykh San'ān, the other famous example of such stories is the account of the pious Barsīsā related in Maulānā Rūmī's *Majālis sab'a*. For the account of San'ān see 'Aṭṭār, *Mantiq at-ṭayr*, pp. 67–88. For the source of 'Aṭṭār's story see B. Furūzānfar, *Sharḥ-i aḥwāl*, Tehran: Dihkhudā, 1353, pp. 320–36; M. Murtaḍawī, *Maktab-i Ḥāfiẓ*, pp. 288–312; M. Qarāgūzlū, "Ghaughā-yi 'ishq" in *Sāya dar khurshīd*, Vol. 2, pp. 403–25; N. Pūrjawādī, "Tuḥfat al-mulūk wa dāstān-i Shaykh-i San'ān" in *Du mujaddid: pazhūhishhā'i dar bāra-yi Muḥammad Ghazālī wa Fakhr Rāzī*, Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Dānishgāhī, 1381, pp. 328–44; also see D. Davis, "The Journey as Paradigm: Literal and Metaphorical Travel in 'Aṭṭār's *Mantiq at-ṭayr*" in *Edebiyāt*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1993, pp. 173–83. For an elegant English translation of this story see idem & A. Darbandi, *Farid ud-din Attar: the Conference of the Birds*, Penguin Classics, 1984, pp. 57–75.

of love is based on bad name (*bad-nāmī*)/if one protects one's head from this, it is due to 'unripeness' (*khāmī*)."³⁰

Like Shaykh San'ān, Majnūn knows that disrepute is an inseparable part of love. It is one of the stages to be passed by the lover on the way to the station of union. Not only in his relationship with Naufal but also at other points in the poem, Majnūn explicitly presents himself as a *malāmatī* lover. Like Shaykh San'ān, Majnūn is an archetype of the *malāmatī* mystic who pays no attention to 'good name and disgrace' (*nām u nang*). Nizāmī shows how the social norms of chivalry clash with the chivalry that is integrated into mystical love. In Naufal's chivalry, *nām u nang* means everything, and the chevalier has to maintain his good reputation, but for a chivalrous *malāmatī* lover, good reputation is an impediment in the path of love. Majnūn is in pursuit of *bad-nāmī* in order to prove his true love. In fact, the whole battle scene may be taken as a strategy employed by Majnūn to prove his *bad-nāmī*. The scene also shows Majnūn's aversion to violence, in contrast to Naufal, who sees violence as one means of attaining one's goal. Nizāmī shows that spiritual chivalry is to fight against one's own lower soul without inflicting any harm on anyone.

In chapter 30, when Majnūn learns that Naufal has failed to fulfil his promise, he reproaches him:

Was this the height of your honesty?
 was this how your army fight with swords?
 Was this the degree of your courage?
 was this the myth of enchaining the demon?
 Was this the combatant urge of your noble steed?
 was this how you throw your lasso?
 (ll. 4–6)

What is significant in Majnūn's rebuke is that, from that point on, he forsakes the hope of union with Laylī and seriously accuses Naufal of having spoiled all his chances of union. Majnūn also reproaches

³⁰ *Manṭiq at-tayr*, p. 82, l. 1476. In the same vein, Hāfiz sings: "What do you say about disgrace (*nang*), for my name is derived from disgrace/what do you ask from the name, for my disgrace is derived from the name." Hāfiz, *Dīwān*, p. 110, gh. 47, l. 8. In another *ghazal*, Hāfiz alludes again to *bad-nāmī* and Shaykh San'ān: "If you are the follower of the path of love do not think of ill repute; Shaykh San'ān pawned his cloak in the liquor-house." p. 174, gh. 79, l. 6; see also Dāya, *Mirsād al-'ibād*, p. 261; English trans., p. 264; *Nuzhat al-majālis*, (1366) p. 470, (1375) p. 530, q. 2960: "Although your love contains disappointments/they are all ripeness after being long unripe; // I received a bad name because of you/your love is worth more than a hundred thousand bad names."

himself for having started a friendship with Naufal, an alliance which has destroyed his chances of union:

That friend who was an amicable enemy,
 you have turned her into enemy entirely.
 And that door which was the gate of worshipping fidelity,
 you have shut to me with a thousands of locks.
 Because of your friendship, I am separated from the beloved;
 you spoiled my affairs, well done, what an achievement!

(ll. 8-10)

By adding a second battle episode in chapter 31, Niẓāmī underscores the deficiency of social chivalry. When Naufal hears Majnūn's reproach, he explains to him that he has made peace because of the lack of soldiers, and that he will gather a mighty army to fight Laylī's clan a second time. Naufal wins this fight and asks for Laylī but her father falls desperately at Naufal's feet and offers his daughter to Naufal himself, begging him not to give her to Majnūn. Naufal accepts the plea and says: "Any woman who is taken by the hand of force/is as if one takes dry bread and salty meat."³¹ (l. 70) Naufal's 'boon companions' (*nadīms*) support the pleas of Laylī's father by saying that Majnūn is not 'constant' (*thābit*) in his behaviour, pointing to the first fight during which Majnūn chose the side of Laylī's clan: "It is better to protect our name and reputation/and to withdraw from this rare event." (l. 82) Following the words of Laylī's father, Naufal leaves Majnūn without thinking of his promise. He thinks more of his own good name than anything else. When Majnūn learns of Naufal's decision, he starts again to reproach Naufal, "raging like a volcano" and shedding torrents of tears:

O you who had firmly placed your feet in friendship,
 you have not performed your promise. (. . .)
 Why did my prey slip from your hands?
 where is that helping hand of yours?
 You took me thirsty to the banks of the Euphrates,
 before I could drink, you entrusted me to hell.

(ll. 88, 90-91)

Expressing these words, Majnūn leaves Naufal and his army and, more desperate than ever, roams the desert.

³¹ The second hemistich means that one can find no satisfaction with a woman who is taken by force.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from the relationship between Naufal and Majnūn is that Niẓāmī changes the historical Naufal into an Iranian chieftain, a chevalier who is determined to help Majnūn. Like Ibn Qutayba's Naufal, Niẓāmī's Naufal fails to fulfil his promise. Niẓāmī's portrayal of this failure relates it to the distinction between social and spiritual chivalry. The poet shows that social chivalry does not rise to selfless love. Naufal's use of violence accomplishes nothing except bloodshed and more enmity between Laylī's family and Majnūn. When mundane conventions are mixed with selfless love, they bring irrecoverable damage rather than any help. The flaws Niẓāmī has incorporated in Naufal's character and his emphasis on Naufal's failure to attain Laylī for Majnūn are enlarged on by Niẓāmī's imitators such as Hātifi, who writes that Naufal actually deceives Majnūn because he desires to marry Laylī himself.³² In Niẓāmī's poem, Majnūn's friendship with Naufal brings about a climactic turn in his character, because from this episode onwards, Majnūn breaks off all contact with mankind and starts to build up a close association with animals.

³² Hātifi, *Laylī u Majnūn*, ed. S. Asadollayev, pp. 81–3, ll. 1588–1636.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“THE TIME OF FALLING LEAVES”

1. *Time and Setting in Laylī and Majnūn*

This chapter will consider the literary significance of the setting and time in Nizāmī's romance. Fully aware of the power of the setting and the course of time in a story, Nizāmī makes ample use of these narrative elements to accentuate several aspects of his romance. The actual setting is the desert, and Majnūn embodies the motif of the desert-traveller as an archetype of the pilgrimage of love. Within the boundaries of the desert there are a number of contrasting locations such as the home and the desert, gardens in Spring and Autumn, inhabited and uninhabited localities, and day and night as backgrounds. These settings serve at a certain level as allegories of human conditions. Aside from their aesthetic effect, they also reflect the character's emotions and influence the reader's reaction. Sometimes the description of a setting is lengthened, giving the setting a more significant role, and sometimes a description is used to distract the reader's attention from the story line. At times the setting is used as an ornament: Nizāmī loves to decorate his settings, even in a single couplet, with the most ingenious and complex images.¹ Like the characters of the story, everything is alive in this poem. The impression of living scenes dominates the entire narrative. The stars, the stones, flora and fauna all feel the sadness in the heart of Nizāmī's lovers. In fact, the stars, the wind, the clouds, flora and fauna are so much alive in this poem that they are invariably personified. Nizāmī assigns moods and feelings to natural objects: nature is presented as a sentient force. The natural phenomena are personalities whose sympathies for Majnūn are as real as those of the chorus in a Greek drama.

Moreover, the scenery accentuates the mystical tenor of the story.

¹ For a study of the decorative aspects of Nizāmī's metaphors see H. Ritter, *Über die Bildersprache Nizāmīs*.

The poet knows that the closer the relationship between the person and the place, the more effective the story is. To achieve the utmost effect, Niẓāmī combines poetical figures such as amphibology, hyperbole, metaphor, metonymy, etc. In what follows, an attempt has been made to analyse three main functions of the setting in Niẓāmī's poem: the setting as background and ornament; the setting's close relation to the character; and the extent to which the setting affects the poem's mysticism.

The way Niẓāmī presents the setting and time is quite exceptional. He has a predilection for welding the setting firmly to the character and to the theme of the story. The character becomes a component of the setting and the setting an essential part of the character, while the course of time is expressed. This type of presentation predates Niẓāmī. Firdausī employs the same device in *Shāh-nāma*. The following is a simple but typical way in which, through the rhetorical figure of 'poetic obligation' (*iltizām*), the poet uses a metonymic process to describe the setting and the character while simultaneously recounting an event. Firdausī's usage of this kind of description serves to maintain the dynamism of the poem. The piece is from the romance of *Ẓāl and Rūdāba*:

503. From the house of the sun-faced maiden
 perfumes continuously ascended as high as the sun.
 504. When the shining sun became invisible,
 the door of the chamber was shut and the key was lost, (. . .)²

In these couplets, Firdausī exploits two different functions of the sun. In the first line, the description of Rūdāba's house is concluded and Rūdāba's brilliance is compared to the sun. In both cases, the sun is a cliché of Firdausī's descriptive style. Conventionally, ideal female beauty and heroic men are compared to the sun and its rays. The sun in the second hemistich of the first line is a hyperbolic use, expressing how high the wonderful perfumes rise from the heroine's house. The sun and the association of the chamber and the key serve to make a transition to the continuation of the narration. The sun in this couplet heralds the time of day in which another episode takes place. This couplet serves simultaneously as the first line of the

² *The Shahnameh*, Vol. 1, p. 198. In the discussion of these couplets in the following two paragraphs, I have largely relied on J.T.P. de Bruijn's analysis based on personal communication.

next passage and can be regarded as the protasis of a temporal clause introduced by the conjunction *chu(n)*, 'when.' The protasis consists of two parallel phrases, both depicting the arrival of the night, one almost directly and the other by the use of the imagery.

Moreover, on the secondary level of suggestive speech another connection between the two lines can be detected. As the surface analysis of the discourse shows, the statement of line 504, is merely an indication of time, but it can also be read as the description of an act taking place inside Rūdāba's house: the heroine (the sun) is retiring to her room for the night. In this case, the couplet would be the conclusion of the preceding description. Although the two couplets are not equivalent, they both have a validity of their own, and the two readings of these lines are not mutually exclusive. On the one hand, the sun as the marker of the time of day obviously provides the basic meaning required by the discursive context of the narration; this is, moreover, indicated by the convention of Persian epic style in which such transitional passages are very common. On the other hand, the second reading, Rūdāba's retiring to bed, appears to be so close to the event described that it should be accepted as an intended *double entendre*, the purpose of which is to express the perfect harmony between a natural phenomenon and the act of a human being. In terms of Persian rhetoric, one might perhaps presume that this is an instance of the figure of 'amphibology' (*ihām*) applied not to a single word but to an entire phrase.

Like Firdausī, Nizāmī makes ample use of protatic and apodotic clauses to indicate time and setting in his romances. As we will see, this kind of device, merging the setting with the plot of the story and with the emotions of the character, reached its zenith with Nizāmī. The best example of the harmony between the character and the setting in Nizāmī's oeuvre and perhaps in the whole of classical Persian literature is *Haft Paykar*, in which the princesses from the seven different climes are presented in the most detailed and resourceful fashion. In all three of his romances, the poet shows a special preference for describing gardens, architecturally complex palaces, royal banquets, and natural phenomena such as the sunset and the sunrise. In *Laylī and Majnūn*, the poet feels restricted because of the raw and barren landscape of the original Bedouin tale. He even complains about this in the prologue to the story in chapter five:

There is neither garden nor kingly banquet,
 no bow-string, nor wine nor blandishment.
 How long can one fare on dry sands and rugged
 mountains, talking about sorrow?

(ll. 58-9)

Despite this complaint, the poet places his initial scene in the Arabian desert but adorns the grounds tastefully, giving additional meaning to the desert, cave and mountain, and including several fantastic sceneries which are purely the product of his imagination and his poetic eloquence.

2. *Night as the marker of time and as a background*

Night, the time of rest and meditation, plays an essential role as a setting and as an indicator of time in Persian love poetry. The use of the night as an integral component of a romance begins with Firdausī, who offers a charming description of night at the beginning of the romance of *Bīzhan and Manīzha* in the *Shāh-nāma*.³ Gurgānī elaborates on this aspect of love poetry in *Wīs and Rāmīn*.⁴ As a faithful follower of these bards, Nizāmī gives two symmetrical descriptions of night in chapters 45 and 59, respectively associated with Majnūn and Laylī. The lovers' affinities with the night are also mentioned at other points in the poem. For instance, the night reminds Majnūn of Laylī, whose name echoes the word for night: "Her tresses were like the night (*layl*) and her name Laylī."⁵ In chapter 42:19, in which Majnūn's mourning at the tomb of his father is described, Nizāmī shows how Majnūn's condition deteriorates because of this new grief: he is compared to a prisoner whose fate becomes worse when day turns into night, and with someone who, being ill in the night, contracts a fever on top of that: "Night arrived for the prisoner of day/the fever returned to the ill of night." Some lines fur-

³ See *The Shahnameh*, Vol. 3, pp. 303-04. For a detailed analysis of this scene see D. Davis, *Epic and Sedition*, pp. 167-74.

⁴ For an analysis of this night scene, see J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, p. 190. J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, pp. 103-07; P. Kunitzsch, "The 'description of the Night' in Gurgānī's *Wīs and Rāmīn*" in *Der Islam*, 1982, 59, pp. 93-110.

⁵ Chapter 13:69b. A few lines earlier (13:61) it is said: "Her locks were like a night, her countenance like a garden/or a torch in the claws of a crow."

ther on, Majnūn's monody on the death of his father and his tears are compared to stars:

In this way Majnūn was breathing sighs and suffering sorrow
blackening a day with his words.
As long as night did not raise its banner,
his lament did not rest from beating the drum.
At night when the shell (*ṣadaf*, i.e. the heavenly vault) with the black-
ness of its back began wrestling with Pisces and the Moon,
Pisces stirred the heat of the shell (*ṣadaf*),
till all its pearls (i.e. the stars) were ejected from its mouth.
From his shell-coloured (*ṣadaf-rang*) eyes, Majnūn
was scattering pearls for miles around.
(ll. 58-62)

Aside from setting the scene, this passage heralds the course of time in the story. As in the specimen from the *Shāh-nāma* cited above, night's arrival is described with rich imagery, which on the secondary level is emblematic of Majnūn's sad situation. As in Firdausi's epic, Nizāmī employs protasis and apodosis: couplets 60 and 61 can be understood as a twofold protasis, describing at one level the fight between day and night, while at the level of the narrative function, they are both a time marker and depict Majnūn's sorrowful state. The protasis precedes the apodosis of line 62, which begins the description of Majnūn's behaviour during the night. Night is described through the metaphor of the battle of the heavenly vault, indicated by the shell, against the constellation Pisces and the moon. It is interesting to note that there is no description of the actual arrival of the night, only the ejection of the stars from the mouth of the shell paradoxically expresses the night and its darkness. It is at this point that the shell becomes an obvious metonym for the night. The entire metaphor is extended to line 62, in which another metonymic process is put into action. The colour of Majnūn's eyes is compared to the black colour of the shell and his tears to sparkling pearls. The metonym of the pearls becomes even more complicated, as they can refer to Majnūn's poetry. In brief, night is a shell which, when it opens its mouth, spreads shimmering pearls, a metonym for stars, that cover the horizons. In the same way, the pearls of Majnūn's poetry become scattered around the world.

It is indeed during the night that Majnūn's poetic ability and his love become most apparent. At night, he becomes active and often goes towards Laylī's alley, singing poetry. The night also functions

as a test for the lover: the inconstant lover falls into a deep sleep, forgetting the whole world including the beloved, whereas the steady lover refrains from slumber and thinks constantly of his love. Majnūn is like a moth which patiently awaits the arrival of night, so that it may flutter around the flame, Laylī. To stay awake during the night because of the pain of separation is a literary *topos* in classical Persian literature. One recurrent image is that the neighbours cannot sleep because of the lover's loud sighs and weeping. However, when they hear nothing from the lover, they think he is done with his love whereas the lover is actually burning up silently.

Moreover, Majnūn reveals several of his important character-traits at night. Like a devoted mystic who supplicates to God during the night, Majnūn prays to God for union in chapter 45. Under the mystic power of the full moon, he observes each of the planets and speaks to Jupiter and Venus in a symbolic language, admiring God's sublime handiwork:

A shining night bright as day,
 through which heaven was fresh like the green of Paradise.
 The golden necklaces being suspended,
 the image of the Wheel had turned into gold.
 Giving the hands of loveliness to each other, the planets
 were dancing upon the spread of the horizon.
 The meteor was throwing a javelin to the demon (*i.e.* the black night),
 singing from a distance: 'There is no power.'⁶
 The air was perfumed with the musk-bag of night,
 and the earth was illuminated by the jewel of the moon.
 By this jewel and that bag, the six storied Wheel
 had made the horizons full of ornaments and fragrance.
 (ll. 1-6)

This fantastic description of night laden with stars continues for more than fifty couplets, depicting each of the planets with their attributes and their relation to other planets in a poetically rich and astronomically detailed fashion. The function of this long, descriptive nocturnal scenery is manifold. First of all, it is used as a meditative pause:

⁶ The phrase in its entirety reads as follows: 'There is no power nor strength except in God, *i.e.* there is no striving against fate, an exclamation uttered at any sudden or perplexing emergency; and to derive away an evil spirit. See Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian English Dictionary*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, pp. 1110-1111.

both Majnūn and the reader are invited to admire God's creation. After he has heard the story of the king of Marw and his dogs, the reader's attention is focused on earthly issues. The nocturnal description helps the reader to focus his attention on a spiritual plane. Secondly, the passage prepares the ground in showing Majnūn's knowledge of astrology. Thirdly, Majnūn finds an opportunity to prove his faith in God and to persuade the people, who accuse him of idol-worshipping, that he believes in God. Fourthly, Majnūn's avoidance of sleep is accentuated. The passage shows how Majnūn spends his nights far from his beloved, holding a vigil like a pious mystic. In fact, the Night (*Layl*) is the name of the 92th 'chapter' (*sūra*) of the Koran, in which God swears by the night. Mystics like Maybudī consider night as the time of the lover's retreat.⁷ In brief, the scenery is used to accentuate several character-traits of Majnūn such as his knowledge of astrology, his faith in God, his resemblance to a devoted mystic, his loyalty to Laylī and how he is inspired by nature.

The second nocturnal scene appears in chapter 59 in which Laylī prays to God until dawn. The passage is at one level a parallel to Majnūn's plea at night, and at another level, a contrasting piece enumerating inauspicious aspects of the night. Although the description in itself shows Nizāmī's artistic genius, the power of the scene lies in the vivid link between Laylī and night. In *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, in the chapter immediately following Khusrau's lustful adventure with the brothel-keeper, Shakar, there is also a description of night in which Shīrīn complains of the long night. In this chapter, Shīrīn is compared to the moon; both are lonely in the long and dark night.⁸ In *Laylī and Majnūn*, night (*layl*) literally melts into Laylī and vice versa. The scene in chapter 59 is an idyllic landscape in which Nizāmī interweaves several elements to intensify the psychological state and the emotions of the heart-broken heroine. The darkness of night reflects Laylī's mourning state. Like the night, which has no companion except the moon, Laylī's only friend is a lamp. In contrast to the starry night referred to above, this night has no stars. While night fills the whole body of the earth with black pearls, Laylī, who is herself a pearl, sheds pearly tears, filling the oceans of the world. She is compared to the highest star: the Pleiades (*thurayyā*). The night being starless, Laylī's tears are compared to a cluster of

⁷ *Kashf al-asrār*, Vol. 2, pp. 616-18.

⁸ For a short analysis of this scene see H. Ritter, *Über die Bildersprache*, pp. 58-9.

stars illuminating the horizons. Like Laylī's long period of separation from Majnūn, the night is very protracted as if dawn will never come:

While night fully adorned the ear and the chin
of the world with pearls,
That pearl (Laylī), like the Pleiades, was throwing
clusters of pearls from her eyes to the ocean.
There was she, the night, pain and a brand-mark [of love];
no one was her companion except a lamp.
Like a moth she didn't sleep at night,
complaining about the night to the lamp:
'This night, whose departure brings joy,
is a brand-mark on the forehead of heaven.
This night is not an [ordinary] night which is apportioned to me;
what is this night? It is the perdition of my life.⁹
Such a dark night which lasts so long
That I have become destitute seeking for a solution.
Imagine that its burning becomes cold,
or its dawn is Day of Resurrection.
I am left in this world-burning night;
may no night be like this, without day (*i.e.* never ending).
Like a farmer whose light is extinguished
and whose wall has fallen, and whose garden is taken away.
Although they broke the neck of the cock,
have they [also] shut the mouth of the dawn?
Imagine that the cock of the old woman has died
or that the night-watcher has taken away the muezzin of the alley.¹⁰
What has happened to the kettle-drummer of the morning,¹¹
that he does not remember the state of the drum?
O Lord, bring me to that light of mine
because I have been brand-marked by his fire.
Perhaps he will offer me from the world-shining [sun]
a broad day in such a narrow night.'
Till morning, she did not interrupt her breath from this prayer;
she did not withhold a note from this strain.

(ll. 1 16)

This nocturnal description is not only used to stress the long separation between the lovers, it also shows Laylī's lament over her husband's death, since this chapter follows the death of Ibn Salām and Majnūn's

⁹ The second hemistich can also be translated as follows: "The night is a pit which has become the perdition of my life."

¹⁰ The old woman is the world and the cock stands for the dawn.

¹¹ The word *naubat-zan*, 'kettle-drummer' refers to the proclaimer of dawn.

hearing of this news. Furthermore, the poet demonstrates Laylī's strong desire to meet Majnūn. Laylī's prayer is answered, because in the next chapter, the lovers are temporarily united.

3. *Day as the marker of time and as a background*

Nizāmī also uses sunrise to present a setting and to mark the course of time.¹² Here again, the poet employs the same device of merging the character's moods and feelings into the background. In chapter 16, a superb depiction of the sunrise provides a good example of the powerful presentation of a setting which is welded together with the character. Here, Majnūn's visit to Laylī is described against the background of the sunrise; it seems that even the land itself begins to stir with excitement:

On the day that the air dressed itself with silk,
and put heaven's golden ankle-ring on its ear,
The silver colour (*sīmāb*) of the stars assumed vermillion
from the fire of the sun because of this account,
Like quicksilver (*sīmāb*), Majnūn, his heart aroused, came running
with those two or three friends, who could endure the beloved's coquetry,
To the land of the beloved.

(ll. 1-4a)

Here Nizāmī integrates the sunrise into the story and into the character of Majnūn. The image of the air putting the sun on its ear like a ring is implicitly connected to Majnūn as a lover who is *ḥalqa ba gūsh*, 'having a ring on the ear,' signifying his subservience to the beloved. In medieval Persia, slaves usually wore a ring. In the second line, the natural process of the sunrise and the crimson colour of the twilight are again related to the story proper. In line three, the sunrise is related to the actual plot through the repetition of the word *sīmāb*, which means quicksilver as well as restlessness. It is worth noting here that the image of the sun and the moon as two lovers who never reach union is implicit in the above imagery and is referred to in the rest of the chapter by naming aspects of the lovers through the rhetorical device of anaphora. Like the moon and the stars, Majnūn and his friends are in search of their beloved. The

¹² For Nizāmī's poetic presentation of the sunrise and sunset see H. Ritter, *Über die Bildersprache*, pp. 22-7.

star imagery does not stop at this point, but is reiterated in various synonyms in this chapter. To give one example: "Laylī was like a star in the litter/Majnūn was like heaven holding the curtain." (l. 11) Here, heaven is compared to a chamberlain (*parda-dār*), who protects the stars in the vessel of night, and in the same way Majnūn is Laylī's chamberlain.

In chapter 51, in which Majnūn hears the news of his mother's death, the sunrise is related to Majnūn's loss and sorrow. The passage can be regarded as a composite protasis (ll. 1-3) followed by line 4, the apodosis, marking the course of time.

When the royal rider of the wheeling Wheel
conquered its adversaries in the battlefield,
It put the cup of wine at the very top
because of its fear of the habitants of the horizons.
Due to this uproar that the sun caused,
it smashed the cup and threw out the wine.
(ll. 1-3)

The death of Majnūn's mother is situated in this setting. Nizāmī surprises the reader with this scene because the sunrise is usually associated with glad tidings, but here heaven is described as a bloody battlefield between the stars. The defeat and the banishment of the other stars by 'the royal rider,' the sun, suggests the reality of death. Even the sun itself, which is compared to a cup of wine, is overcome by its own display, 'the dawn.' It is the sun itself that breaks the cup of wine and diffuses wine over the horizons. The red colour of wine also implies blood in this kind of imagery; the lexicalised metaphor of the sun cutting the head of night is implicit here. By using this imagery, Nizāmī underlines the fleeting nature of life and the close relation between life and death. The metaphor draws an implicit parallel between the cycle of night and day and man's life-span.

When Nizāmī describes the temporal union between the lovers in chapter 60, he again uses the image of the sunrise as the setting and time marker, but in a completely different way.

When the early rising king sat cheerfully
on the throne at the morning glow,
The day emerged by way of the sun/love (*mīhr*)
and the horizons surrendered to the sun/love
A day, which dazzled the eyes with joyfulness,
was brighter than a thousand of Nau Rūz feasts,
The dawn had girdled itself with the belt of desire;

the tumult of sorrow was receded from the world,
Because of an abundance of desire, Laylī
was like the moon walking tall in heaven.
(ll. 1-5)

Here, the setting is not combined with the character, but with time and the theme of the chapter: "The Union of Laylī and Majnūn." In the same way that the elements in the apodosis (ll. 4-5) refer to the departure of sorrow, and to the abundance of desire in Laylī, every component of the protasis (ll. 1-4) is connected to love and joy. The sun, as a metonym for the king, wakes up early and sits cheerfully on its throne. The sun's early rise emphasises the long duration of the day of union to come. Since the word *mihr* means both 'sun' and 'love,' the metaphor has another layer of interpretation: the dawn breaks through *mihr* and the entire horizon is effused with the rays of *mihr*. Furthermore, the personified day has such a glowing eye that its freshness, brightness and happiness surpass even the most significant Persian annual feast, Nau Rūz.

Another depiction of the sunrise as the setting occurs in chapter 33. The marking of the course of time can be detected by distinguishing a protasis (ll. 1-2) and an apodosis (l. 3):

When the dawn hoisted the banner of the illuminator
of the world by auspicious fortune,
the Abyssinian knit (*chīn*) his eye-brows, because the mirror of China
(*chīn*) arose from China (*chīn*) (or opened its frown, *chīn*).
That mirror which had an illusion in his hand,
was like a mirror, although *dar zang*, in Africa (or rusted).
(ll. 1-3)

The "auspicious fortune" is a piece of proleptic information, predicting the releasing of a deer from a trap by Majnūn. Majnūn's confused state is indicated by the mention of two races namely, *ḥabash* and *zang*. *Ḥabash* refers to Arabia and Africa, and *chīn*, refers to China. *Ḥabash* stands for west and night whereas *chīn* symbolises east and day. Although the mirror of China, the sun, rises from China, or opens its frown (*chīn*), Majnūn, who is compared to a mirror, holds the illusion of union in his hand. He is compared with the sun in *zang*. The word connotes among other things 'rust' on a mirror as well as 'black colour' and 'black man.' By making a pun on the words *chīn* and *zang*, Nizāmī shows Majnūn's distressed state. The key-word used to merge the character to the setting is the mirror. The poet first uses the metaphor of the mirror of China to designate

the sun. Then he relates the mirror to Majnūn, who fantasises about union with Laylī.¹³ Afterwards, Majnūn is compared to the sun. He is not merely compared to a mirror, he is a mirror who still has rust on his heart, or a sun which is still in the west. The use of such a metaphor at this point of the poem is very significant. Mystically speaking, it shows that Majnūn has to polish the mirror of his heart with the brush of asceticism. Like the sun, he is crossing dark surroundings on his journey in order to reach illumination. This image also accords with the motif of the desert-journey, which will be discussed below; Majnūn is travelling in the desert to arrive at the station of the beloved.

4. *The garden as the ornament of the setting*

The garden in Persian literature often serves as the setting and ornament of a romance. Architecturally, many famous Persian books such as Sa'dī's *Gulistān*, and Amīr Khusrau's *Hasht-bihisht* are structured on the basis of the gardens of Paradise: a typically Persian garden with eight gates (*hasht bihisht*) and four running streams. In romances, the garden imagery is usually linked with the allegory of love. It is a setting for feasts, revelry, seasonal and national celebrations such as 'New Year' (*Nau Rūz*) and the 'Autumnal feast' (*Mihriḡān*).¹⁴ It is a place of meditation and retreat for mystics to cherish the heavenly reality. It is a place of inspiration for poets and artists and it is, of course, a romantic setting for the lovers to exchange vows and to make love. Gurgānī's romance opens in a garden on the first day of Nau Rūz, and many of its romantic scenes, like those in Firdausī's

¹³ Majnūn is frequently compared to a rusted mirror. See, for instance, chapter 50:30.

¹⁴ W.L. Hanaway, in *ELr*, s.v. Bāg, iii. In Persian Literature; idem, "Paradise on Earth: The Terrestrial Garden in Persian Literature" in *The Islamic Garden*, ed. R. Ettinghausen. Washington, 1976, pp. 43-67; for the garden imagery in the works of Maulānā Rūmī see A. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, pp. 82-93; see also V. Sackville-West, "Persian Gardens" in *The Legacy of Persia*, ed. A.J. Arberry, Oxford: Clarendon, 1953, pp. 259-90, and C.H. de Fouchécour, *La description de la Nature dans la Poésie lyrique Persane du XI^e Siècle*, Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1969; J.S. Meisami, "Allegorical Gardens in the Persian Poetic Tradition: Niẓāmī, Rūmī, Ḥāfiz" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 17, 1985, pp. 229-60. For a comprehensive study on flora see G. Rangchī, *Gul u ḡyāh dar adabiyāt-i manẓūm-i Fārsī*, Tehran: Pazhūhishgāh, 1372. For Arabic garden poetry see chapter five of J. Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd*, pp. 168-201.

epic, take place in a garden. Persian romances often use descriptions of flowering gardens to enhance the beauty of the beloved who is herself a living garden, a reflection of Paradise on earth. The beloved is not so much likened to a garden, she is herself the blooming garden.

The description of gardens was conventionalised by the Ghaznawīd poets such as Farrukhī, 'Unṣurī and Manūchihīrī.¹⁵ Here the animating description of the garden is closely connected with the time of year and the changing of the seasons. Almost all descriptions of nature depict gardens in the spring and the autumn. The vernal garden is described in a perfect harmony in which a rich variety of flowers and trees communicate not only with each other but also with singing birds such as nightingales and partridges. A gentle gale is often the vanguard of the spring. The colours of the trees and flowers are compared to precious stones such as pearls, rubies and turquoise; their fragrance to ambergris and musk; and the newly opening leaves to silk and brocade.

In contrast to a vernal garden, the autumnal garden is extremely gloomy. As in many other cultures, according to the Persian literary paradigm, autumn denotes decay and sorrow. Almost every natural aspect of autumn betokens something sorrowful for the lover. Autumn is often personified as a raider and the plants as desperate lovers. An autumnal storm steals the colours from flowers and murders the rose, a symbol of the beloved, and expels the nightingale, the lover, from the garden. The rose is replaced by thorns, the sweet song of the nightingale by the raucous caw of the crow, the warm breeze by cold winds, and the running stream by stagnant water. The dark clouds and the rain represent the mourning and the tears nature is shedding for the separated lovers. The lover's pale face, which in Persian is usually referred to as yellow, corresponds to the colour of autumn. The image of the migrating cranes (*kulāngān*) reiterates this separation. The cracking of the peel of the pomegranate, the effusion of its purple juice and the leaves' scarlet colour are all associated with bloodshed in the bloody battle between the defenceless plants and the autumn's attack.

It should be mentioned here that since autumn includes one of the celebrated Persian feasts, the Mihrigān, and with the time of

¹⁵ M.R. Shafī'ī Kadkanī, *Šuvar-i khayāl dar shī'r-i Fārsī*, Tehran: Āgāh, 1366, especially pp. 486-525.

preparing wine, the majority of descriptions of autumn gardens of the Ghaznawid poets are joyful. Roughly speaking, it was only after the Ghaznawid era that gloomy autumn gardens became prominent in Persian lyric and narrative poetry. However the cutting off of the vine and its personification are amongst the most melancholy of metaphors, and these are found in the autumnal descriptions of the Ghaznawid poets.

In *Haft Paykar* and *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, Nizāmī depicts gardens in which the queenly heroines and their royal attendants celebrate feasts. Although *Laylī and Majnūn* is situated in a barren desert, this does not prevent him describing gardens: he adds floral setting to the story under the guise of spring (chapter 25), autumn (chapter 61) and Paradise (chapter 65).¹⁶ The first and last of these are gardens in full bloom. The garden settings serve different purposes. Sometimes they are simply depicted to give the romance a lyrical and descriptive pause, and at times they are used to reflect the inner feelings of the lovers. I will deal only with the garden of spring.

Although this garden is regarded by some scholars as a symbolic sign of Laylī's feelings and mood, this is not mentioned in the poem. Seeing this ravishing garden, Laylī does not go into it, but chooses instead to go to a palm-grove. Since palm trees were a symbol of loyalty in the ancient Near East, Laylī's choice is perhaps based on her loyal character.¹⁷ When the enlightened old man arranges a meeting between Laylī and Majnūn in chapter 52, he again chooses a palm grove as the setting. Laylī's avoidance can also be interpreted as a sign that she is deflating the hope of union. Her avoidance can also be seen as evidence of her gentle nature: when she sees this perfectly trimmed garden, Laylī does not want to disturb its solitude and harmony with her tense emotions. Since the description of the garden follows the chapter on "The Attribute of Laylī's Beauty," the garden can serve as a reinforcement of Laylī's physical beauty as well.

Laylī's initial intention of going out is actually to tell her innermost secret to the nightingale, hoping to hear something from Majnūn.

¹⁶ For a beautiful English translation of Nizāmī's description of the garden in Paradise see E.G. Browne's *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, pp. 407–08.

¹⁷ E.B. Moynihan, *Paradise as a Garden*, London: Scholar Press, 1980, p. 24. This symbolic aspect of the palm tree is not mentioned either by H. A'lam in *Elr*, under Date Palm: the Palm in Literature and Folklore, or by A. Tafazzoli in *Elr*, under Draxt ī Āsūrīg.

Laylī's choice of the palm-grove rather than the garden enables the narrator to preserve the Bedouin background of the story.¹⁸ Nizāmī uses this garden as a colourful ornament as well as a meditative and descriptive pause, intensifying the lyrical and mystical tone of the story. What is significant in this scene is that, despite her choice of the palm-grove, Laylī looks for a cypress tree so that she can lie in its shadow. Majnūn is repeatedly compared to a cypress. The tree is both a symbol of eternity and of the beloved. It stands for Ṭūbā, a majestic tree in Paradise which is the representation of the divine Beloved.¹⁹ The vernal garden is a splendid example of the *locus amoenus* at the height of its perfection; the whole passage quoted here can be taken as a long protasis followed by an apodosis in line 23 beginning with "in such a majestic garden":

When the flowers drew a veil on the field,
the earth became fresh with the faces of roses,
On the trees, the blossoms smiled
like a little coin (*sikka*) [as an auspicious ornament] on the face of a
bride,
From the ruby tulips and yellow roses,
the world hoisted a two-coloured flag,
Because of the abundance of food and melodies in the garden and
the orchard, the nightingale of a thousand strains started to sing,
The freshness of new-grown green
was creating emeralds from fresh pearls,
The tulip scattered her vermilion leaves [in such a way]
that her blackness had fallen on the edges,
Because of their length, the locks of the violets,
had fallen on the ground when they were playing,
The rose-buds were tightening their girdles;
in producing thorns, they drew their arrows,
The rose acquired golden silk brocade;
the breeze was seizing earrings,
Because of the rose-coloured sun, the water-lily
threw on the water her shield without contention,
The box tree was combing her locks;
the pomegranate blossoms were preparing their grains,

¹⁸ It is also possible that Nizāmī is maintaining a Persian way of admiring the garden, because as Elizabeth B. Moynihan has pointed out, the Persians seldom walk in their gardens, preferring to observe them from a pavilion, "much like the ca. fifth-century B.C. Pavilions of Cyrus at Pasargadae." See Moynihan, *Paradise*, p. 49.

¹⁹ For a description of Ṭūbā see Suhrawardī, *Aql-i surkh* in *Oeuvres Philosophiques*, Vol. 3, p. 232.

The hyacinth opened her [musky] navel-bag,
 and the rose stretched her hand towards the hyacinth,
 Because of her heated haughtiness, the narciss had such an inflamed
 nose/brain
 that it suddenly woke up like those who have fever,
 The boiling of the drops of wine
 made the blood stream from the veins of the love tree,
 From the silvery fountain, oozing from the jasmine,
 the wild rose was washing the petals she still possessed,
 The rose opened her eye with awe,
 when she saw no equal, she started to flirt amorously,
 The lily had no tongue, it had a blade at her side,
 no, no, I mistake, she had a blade on her head,
 The birds whose tongues were tight like crows
 let their tongues loose in the garden,
 The francolin aroused from its heart (*dil*) roasted meat (*kabāb*),
 [while] the turtle-dove was pouring salt from its chest,
 Every ring-dove was upon the plane-tree,
 crooning the account of some beloved,
 The nightingale had gone to the top of the tree
 heaving a sigh like Majnūn,
 Like the countenance of Laylī in the litter
 the rose put forth its head to hold its crown, (...)

(ll. 1-22)

Both in this garden scenery and in his other descriptions, the poet anthropomorphises flowers with human feelings, gestures and attributes.²⁰ The garden is a perfectly harmonious community of flowers. Although Nizāmī's description is a conventional one, he gives it his own imprint by using rich imagery. The flowers as a whole display a sense of unity. The rose stretches her hand to the hyacinth to receive odour. The wild rose needs the silvery dew of the jasmine to wash her petals. The queen of the flowers, the rose, dares not burgeon. As soon as she opens her eyes for the first time in this blooming garden, she is overwhelmed by its sublimity; she starts to flirt only when she finds out that she has no match. The petals of the lily are compared to tongues, i.e. the lover's eloquence. However, as soon as the lover sees the beloved in the garden, he becomes muted, an eloquent silence. The lily's stamen and leaf are likened to a blade.

Moreover, the salient feature of such scenes is that Nizāmī intensifies

²⁰ For an analysis of this aspect of Nizāmī's poetic see H. Ritter, *Über die Bildersprache*, p. 8.

the power of the scenery by assigning floral qualities to other objects outside the garden. For instance, the veil in line one, which is an external element, becomes part of the garden: the veil is integrated into the imagery in the second hemistich when the reader finds that the entire field is covered with roses. A clearer example occurs in couplet ten, in which the colour of the sun's ray is the same as the colour of the rose. The colour is, in fact, a semantic link to the golden silk in line nine. In other words, the sun receives a floral quality, and it is primarily because of this quality that the water-lily is convinced that she can throw her shield into the water and submit herself to the sun. Such floral imagery entail a strong erotic connotation, but an expansion on that would take us beyond the theme of 'time and setting'.²¹

In contrast to the garden of the spring equinox, there is a symmetrical description of a garden in autumn towards the end of the poem, in chapter 61. Here, Laylī's death is painted against the background of the description of the melancholy physical reality of autumn. Nizāmī uses the scene to underline Laylī's image as a fragile flower and to intensify the sorrow at her death. The poet universalises her death and elevates her to the level of divine. The whole world is in anguish. Moreover, the inevitability of death is stressed by drawing on the imagery of time and the changes occurring in nature:

It is right that at the time of falling leaves,
tears of blood are shed from the leaves,
That the blood, which is contained in each bough,
drips from its nostrils,
That the water-vase catches cold;
that the cheeks of the garden turn yellow,
That the branch shows the blister of death,
that the leaf seeks for gold but finds dust,
That the narcissus puts her apparel upon the camel,
that the box-tree falls from the top of the throne,
That the countenance of the jasmine wrinkles,
that the rose holds in her hand the letter of blood (*i.e.* its death warrant)
That the forelock of the earth writhes on top
of the grass like the serpents of Ḍaḥḥāk.²²

²¹ In Persian floral imagery, the sun often makes flowers pregnant; cf. Manūchihrī's *qaṣīda* 31 in which a grape describes in great detail how she has been made pregnant by the sun. For an analysis of this *qaṣīda* see my article, "The Art of Riddling in Classical Persian Poetry" in *Edebiyāt*, Vol. 12, 2001, pp. 25-7.

²² Ḍaḥḥāk is a mythical king on whose shoulders two serpents grow.

When the contrary wind arrives from afar
 it is right that the leaves should fall.
 Those who flee from drowning,
 will cast away their provisions at the thought of the wind.

This gloomy description goes on for 19 couplets until Nizāmī links it to the autumn of Laylī's life, when her freshness fades away in one rout and ruin. This is indeed a good example, demonstrating how autumn is allegorised to enrich the poem's background and to show the close relation between man and nature: man's life cycle corresponds to that of the garden. Human attributes are again assigned to the flora. The openings on the dead branches from which gum flows are likened to human nostrils, and the gum to blood. The buds on the leafless branches are compared to small pox on the face of the bough. Like men, the leaves endure any hardship during their lifetime to gain gold, but as soon as they seem to have attained it, death arrives. Such metaphors express the inevitability of death and the world's transience. The egocentric narcissus has no alternative but to undress herself and send her clothing away. By attributing human qualities to the flora and vice versa, the poet emphasises the equality between man and the lower forms of life. Laylī as a rose-garden becomes the subject of the autumnal assault. Even Majnūn, who considers himself as the gardener, and who is described as a cypress which survives autumn's raid, is powerless in the face of this inescapable natural change and painfully watches the death of his love:

In the battlefield of such an autumn
 the rose-garden (Laylī) received blows.
 Laylī had fallen from her seat of honour (*i.e.* the flower of her youth
 and beauty) into the pit of suffering.
 The spring of her garden fell victim to the evil eye;
 the storm dealt a blow to her lamp.
 (ll. 20-22)

In brief, the garden is described as a battleground which is invaded by the autumnal storm, robbing the freshness of the flowers and painting them with autumnal colours.

5. *War as a setting*

War settings are a conventional aspect of 'Udhrite love poetry. 'Ayyūqī's 'Udhrite romance devotes relatively long chapters to war scenes. In conformity with this love tradition and knowing that his courtly audience would love a combat-scene, Nizāmī presents two successive war-scenes. The encounter depicted by Nizāmī does not occur in the Arabic sources. Although these scenes have a distinct Iranian colour, the Bedouin features do not fade into the background. If we compare the war-scenes in *Laylī and Majnūn* to those depicted in the *Iskandar-nāma*, it becomes clear that there is a difference in the way the poet has presented them. In the former, the large army of the two adversary parties and their primitive fighting equipment such as lances, daggers and swords are mentioned. In the latter, in the war-scene between Alexander and Darius, the number of horsemen, their advanced armour, war strategies and army organisation are all detailed. The poet refrains from over-ornamenting the depiction of the war in *Laylī and Majnūn*. Here, Nizāmī introduces a foreign element at the outset, so that the reader will notice its outlandish character. He locates the battlefield at the foot of Mount Qubays near the city of Mecca. The foreign setting allows the author to treat the battle differently. To save space, only the second war-scene, occurring in chapter 31, is quoted here as an example:

On the day that Naufal moved his army
people who saw him were struck with perplexity.
Because of the earthquake of the rising army,
the summit of Bu Qubays crumbled.
When the enemy heard their clamour
they lined up, ready to fight.
The chief of the tribe came
with an army at a watching-place.
He found the whole desert full of lances and daggers;
the swell of the army had filled the horizon.
The tumult of bells and the complaint of reeds
would have stirred the heart in a dead man's body. (. . .)
The heart of the two armies clashed with each other;
each blade, which struck, made a head fall.
Pebbles were washed with running blood;
from the rolling pebbles, red gems appeared.
(ll. 2 7, 10 11)

6. *The symbolic significance of the cave and the desert*

Deserts and caves occur time and again in Nizāmī's work as the residence of ascetics. As in the mysticism of other religions, the cave has a highly symbolic value in the Persian mystical tradition. It is the title of the eighteenth *sūra* of the Koran, which tells the story of the Seven Sleepers, who took refuge in a cave.²³ The cave is also the place where the Prophet received his first 'divine revelation' (*wahy*) from the angel Gabriel as described in the 96th *sūra* of the Koran. And it is the place that saved the Prophet and his companions from their pursuers, during the historical flight from Mecca to Medina. The latter event has given rise to the metaphor 'companion of the cave' (*yār-i ghār*), a literary commonplace in Persian, referring to an intimate friend or a spiritual relationship between two people.²⁴ In the light of the spiritual aspects of caves mentioned in the Koran, it is not surprising that Islamic mystics spent many years in caves. The association of the mystic and the cave is almost a literary convention in Persian literature: numerous allusions are made to mystics who spend long years in caves to find refuge from the calamity of men and to receive the divine revelation. Being in such a place of solitude hidden from the sight of men, the mystic is usually described as a treasure. Majnūn is compared with a treasure hidden in a cave several times throughout the poem. There are many references in mystical writings to Sufis who retreat in the cave to complete their ascetic training.²⁵ For Nizāmī, the cave is the dwelling place of the ascetics. He presents ascetics living in caves in *Laylī and Majnūn*, but also in his other works. In *Sharaf-nāma*, the mother of Alexander is portrayed as an ascetic woman who gives birth to Alexander in a cave.²⁶ In the same poem, Alexander visits ascetics in their caves for advice.

Nizāmī uses the cave as Majnūn's lodging. The cave functions not only as a decoration in the poem's Bedouin landscape, but also as a refuge in which Majnūn hides to avoid seeing people. Chapter 20:55-6 describes how Majnūn's father looks in every crevice of the rocks in search of his son. In chapter 32:44, Majnūn retreats into a

²³ For the story of the Seven Sleepers see Maybudī's *Kashf al-asrār*, Vol. 2, pp. 4-10.

²⁴ Cf. *Laylī u Majnūn*, 36:96.

²⁵ 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, p. 185.

²⁶ See *Sharaf-nāma*, ed. W. Dastgirdī, p. 81.

cave at nightfall. The metaphor used in the following couplet shows the poet's attempt to connect Majnūn with his setting: "He went into a cave lamenting/like an alligator bitten by a serpent." In chapter 39:16-8, Majnūn's residence is described as the 'land of chastisement' (*uqūbat-ābād*) a grim and gloomy place which looks like a grave:

There, in that land of chastisement
There is a place. What kind of a place? It is a furrow,
like a horrible grave.
Like a black cloud, ugly and unsightly,
like white naphtha, like the mine of fire.²⁷

Like the cave, the desert functions as the setting of Nizāmī's poem. J. Scott Meisami refers to this barren setting to condemn Majnūn's character. She argues that "Majnūn is regularly associated with the sterile, inhospitable desert, a place fit only for animals and madmen but not suitable for human habitation."²⁸ Elsewhere, however, Meisami contradicts this in her analysis of the setting of love in Persian poetry: "A closely associated image is that of love as a desert which the lover must traverse. (. . .) The motif of the desert journey is often joined to that of the pilgrimage of love: love's pilgrim wanders through the desert, seeking guidance (which may of course be spiritual as well as physical)."²⁹ Meisami does not consider these symbolic aspects of the desert when analysing *Laylī and Majnūn*, yet this poem can be taken as the prototype of the motif of the desert-journey, and Majnūn as the archetypal pilgrim of love. Nizāmī exploits every aspect of this motif through Majnūn's character and his environment.

As in Christian mysticism, where the desert is used to describe the mystical experience of union with the Mystery, in Islamic mysticism, the desert is the passage to union with the beloved. As far as I can judge, Islamic mystics do not go so far as, for instance, Meister Eckhart, who refers to God as the desert, *einoede*, *wüeste*, and *wüestunge*, or like the great thirteenth century Beguine mystic Hadewijch, who alludes to the desert as a "place of suffering created by divine

²⁷ See also chapter 49:9-10 in which Salīm-i 'Āmirī finds Majnūn in the corner of a mountain: "Till he found Majnūn in the corner of a mountain/free from the bondage of any group//Blockading the road to men by shying from them/two or three wild beasts were sitting around him."

²⁸ J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 161.

²⁹ J. Scott Meisami, "Allegorical Techniques in the Ghazals of Hāfez" in *Edebiyât*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1979, pp. 8-9.

Love.”³⁰ Islamic mystics refer to the desert as the setting of love by creating compounds such as *bādiya-yi* or *bīyābān-i* or *ṣahrā-yi* ‘*ishq*, all meaning ‘the desert of love.’ Other compounds such as ‘the desert of longing’ (*bīyābān-i ṭalab*) and ‘the desert of annihilation’ (*bīyābān-i fanā*) also recur in Persian love poetry. What is more, the desert is often used by poets such as ‘Aṭṭār and Sanā’ī as a symbol for the arduous and hazardous journey on the mystical path. The latter’s celebrated poem, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* takes place in the desert: thirty birds (*sī-murgh*) have to traverse seven valleys in the desert in order to meet their king, Sīmurgh, in Mount Qāf. The matchless pun on *sīmurgh* exhibits how divinity is integrated in man himself: when the birds attain their goal. Sanā’ī describes the path of love crossing the desert as the notch of an arrow, its thistles are formed of arrows, it is full of serpents, scorpions and monsters.³¹

Persian mystics repeatedly allude to the desert as a place of divine revelation. For the mystic Bāyazīd, the desert is the place where love descends. In one of his reports, he says: “I went to the wilderness, love had rained and the earth was drenched. As the feet of a person plunge into the bed of mud, my feet sank into love.”³² In addition, many references are made to the desert as the dwelling of the Beloved. The House of God, the *Ka’ba*, which is often alluded to as the symbol of the beloved, is the reason for pilgrim-lovers to endanger their lives crossing the deserts to meet her. Among the favourite allegories used by mystic poets is the account of Moses walking through the desert to ascend Mount Sinai, where he will meet the Divine. This story occurs in several places of the Koran, the most elaborated of which in *sūra* 20. Mystics use this account to demonstrate how God showed his face to Moses in the desert. The journey of Alexander and Khidr through the dark desert in search of the Fountain of Life is another favourite. Like Moses’ trip, Alexander’s journey functions as an allegory of the mystic’s itinerary to the Beloved. The barren desert is one of the last stages before the final station. It is in the world of darkness and wilderness where the Fountain of Life can be found. *Laylī and Majnūn* contains numerous

³⁰ For a thorough analysis of this *topos* see B. McGinn, “Ocean and Desert as Symbols of Mystical Absorption in the Christian Tradition” in *The Journal of Religion*, 7, April, 1994, pp. 151–81.

³¹ See *Ḥadiqat al-ḥaqīqa*, pp. 487–89, chapter with the title, “On the qualities of the desert, it is said.”

³² ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-auliya*, p. 157.

allusions to Laylī as the Fountain of Life and Majnūn as Khidr. From the outset of the story, Laylī is compared to a fountain and Majnūn to a thirsty person, for instance in chapter 17:31–2, when Majnūn's father is asking the hand of Laylī from her father:

This thirsty heart, who is born from the sand,
has fixed his eyes on your fount.
Every fount possessing the water of favour
is agreeable to the soul of a thirsty man.

In chapter 12:135–36, Nizāmī compares the entire story to the Fountain of Life:

O Nizāmī, it is better that on this road
you strike your tent at the Fount like Khidr,
To be satiated like an unpierced pearl
with the limpid waters of Majnūn's love.

In chapter 38:7–8, we read how Majnūn hastens to see Laylī, who is compared to the Fountain of Life:

In search of the Fountain of Life,
he sprang in a way that you can imagine,
Heading towards the land of that *parī*-faced,
emaciated as he was, like a strand of hair, because of his moaning.

In chapter 52:44–5, an illuminated old man uses the same metaphor saying to Majnūn:

He said: 'O you on whom the empire of love is based,
live as long as love exists;
Drink from your own Fount like Khidr
and journey the horizons like Alexander.

In chapter 47:34, in her letter to Majnūn, Laylī compares him to Khidr, desiring to eternalise their relationship: "The traces of your encampment are green and you have a skirt like Khidr/agree with me like the Fountain of Khidr (*i.e.* Fountain of Life)."³³

The most vivid symbolism of the desert in Persian mystical writings belongs without doubt to Nizāmī's contemporary mystic-philosopher Shihāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī. He regularly refers to the desert as the locality of the chivalrous man of God (*mard*). The desert is

³³ See also chapter 24:49. Here Laylī is compared to "the fount of the moon": "In searching for the light (Majnūn), the fount (*chashma*) of the moon (Laylī)/was looking (*chashm*) out [for him] like a fount (*chashma*)."

the setting where he “lays the foundation of his mystical symbol.”³⁴ It is in the desert that his protagonists have to close their exterior senses and rely entirely on their interior sensory faculties to see the wonders and mysteries of the creation. Like Majnūn, the heroes of Suhrawardī are ceaselessly trying to emancipate themselves from the ‘the four bonds’ (*chahār band*) in order to be released from the ‘world of astonishment’ and to enter into the ‘world of freedom’: the desert. It is indeed in this setting that the traveller meets a wise, elder and enlightened man (*pīr-i nūrānī*), who guides him to the celestial plane. Majnūn too meets with such a man in the desert, and his ill-fortune changes from that point. The man even creates a temporal union for the lovers, and then disappears.

The physical reality of the desert corresponds entirely to Majnūn’s physical appearance. Like the desert which is barren, Majnūn prefers to wear nothing; the sun is the dress of both Majnūn and the desert. Majnūn’s constant battle against the demon of his lower soul (*nafs*) corresponds to the image of the desert as the home of demons. The desert’s starkness eventually annihilates these demons. Internally Majnūn destroys his lower soul while externally, the wild beasts become his subjects and he has full control over them. In addition, Majnūn’s emaciated and dried up body, which resembles the arid desert, contrasts with his cultivated soul. The desert is a world where the mystic is confronted with his inner self in solitude. One has to journey this world alone: even the tracks of the traveller disappear.

The desert means freedom for Majnūn. This is reiterated by the contrasting settings of the desert and Majnūn’s paternal home. At home, he feels imprisoned, disturbed by people and distracted from the thought of Laylī. In contrast, the desert provides him with both physical and mental freedom. When Majnūn’s mother asks him to return home in chapter 50:57–60, Majnūn describes home as a cage within a cage, *i.e.* the world:

I am trying to release the bird of my
soul from the frame of this cage.
Are you taking me once again into the trap
so that I be trapped in two cages?
Do not invite me to return home,

³⁴ For the significance of the desert in the works of Suhrawardī see K. Tehrani’s analysis in *Mystical Symbolism in Four Treatises of Suhrawardī*, Columbia University, Ph.D. dissertation, 1974, pp. 137–41.

I fear to die in the home's insalubrious climate.
I am alive and it is better to go in the desert
than to die within the doors of the house.

It is indeed in the desert that Majnūn's character develops. He becomes a learned and spiritual man who knows the Mystery. At one level, Majnūn reminds the reader of the Desert Fathers, who as true athletes fought their battle in the arena of the desert. In fact, miniature paintings of Majnūn showing him sitting in a barren wilderness with a lion at his feet remind Western viewers of the Desert Fathers. Such a comparison shows the universality of mysticism.

In conclusion, Nizāmī subtly exploits various aspects of the setting. First of all, although he transposes the story into the Iranian milieu, he preserves the Bedouin background and Arabic customs. But he enlivens the arid Arabian setting by adding several rhapsodic descriptions of nature. As Mieke Bal has pointed out: "The way in which descriptions are inserted characterise the rhetorical strategy of the narrator."³⁵ The descriptions are necessary both practically and logically. They make the motivation of the narrator more explicit and evident. In Majnūn and Laylī, the descriptions are often meant not only as a magnificent piece of decoration, but also as a meditative interval. This aspect is augmented as the character in the setting contemplates life, love, death and God. In other words, through the relatively large number of descriptive passages, Nizāmī accentuates the meditative and mystical aspect of the poem. The characters as well as the reader are compelled to contemplate nature.

Secondly, the description of the setting provides opportunities for the poet to embellish the poem, revealing the moods of the characters by creating multi-layered metaphors. The use of animating metaphors invigorates the background and alleviates the sad tone of the narrative, as well as giving an opportunity for Nizāmī to display his mastery of metaphoric and allegorical styles and Persian rhetoric. With a minimum of words the poet achieves maximal effect. The use of the setting as an allegory to reveal the character's inner feelings regulates the story's theme and influences the reader's response. Nizāmī's setting usually displays a symbolic congruence with various aspects of the characters and theme.

Thirdly, the metaphors Nizāmī uses to depict time and setting

³⁵ M. Bal, *Narratology*, p. 37.

often have a metonymic value. Through the use of metonymy, the character and theme become an indispensable attribute of the setting, and *vice versa*. The complexity of Nizāmī's metaphors lies in the way the metonymic process is presented. The words used as metonymic tools often have several meanings, and various interpretations may be possible simultaneously. To make the metaphor more complex and at the same time more appealing, the poet also uses elliptical metonymy. Short references to mythic figures, to the Iranian world-view and rare imagery mean that it is not always easy to unravel his metaphors.

CONCLUSION

Nizāmī broaches a wide range of themes drawing on ascetic and mystical tenets in his romance. His narrative is indeed ingeniously interwoven with mystical theories; this means that an interpretation of a romance such as *Laylī and Majnūn* demands a profound knowledge of the mystical tradition. Persian love poetry is so deeply saturated with mystical notions that even a secular romance may sometimes be interpreted in mystical terms. By placing love in such a context, the poet displays how love reaches maturity by means of ascetic training. With the growth of love, the lover's earthly habits and interests are removed, and love looms larger and larger in the lover. In addition to refining and improving man's potential, love also possesses a seemingly negative trait: while purifying the lover from his base qualities, it makes the lover emaciated. Nizāmī exhibits this essential feature of love when he depicts Majnūn's physical appearance. Love, like a creeper that strangles any tree it twists itself around, has emaciated Majnūn and eventually destroys his lower self. In the character of Majnūn, Nizāmī demonstrates what mystic theorists on love, such as Aḥmad Ghazālī, had written on the triumphing quality of love: love finally devours both the lover and the beloved, so that only love remains. Nizāmī also shows the effects of such a love by tying certain attributes to Majnūn and by presenting him as a symbol of love. Love causes even wild beasts to lose their ferociousness and live peacefully with other animals under Majnūn's command. It is also thanks to love that Majnūn's poetic capacity reaches perfection and is admired by both friend and foe. Nizāmī shows love transforming human qualities to the absolute good.

Nizāmī's narrative is undoubtedly a didactic romance, teaching the reader a way of life guided by love. The concomitants of this love include ascetic practices, confessing one's shortcomings, absolute altruism and self-abasement, bidding farewell to the world, rejecting false piety by choosing ill repute and disgrace, desire for death, preferably at the hands of the beloved, abandoning even the most sacred beliefs such as praying to the House of God for the sake of the beloved, constant weeping because of man's wretched state in the world of Fate and so forth and so on. This discipline of love is

shared by antinomian (*malāmaṭī* and *qalandarī*) mystics who, without any fallacious piety and hypocrisy, divest themselves of the fine dress of good name and accept reproach and humiliation for the sake of the Beloved. In many ways, this philosophy of love serves as an alternative to social norms. Gauging the abundance of these elements in the poem, it is evident that Nizāmī's romance cannot adequately be described without a thorough appreciation of antinomian views of love and how antinomian mystics behaved during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Nizāmī creates a unity between Majnūn's actions and behaviour, and mystical concepts of love. In many respects Majnūn resembles an antinomian mystic travelling tirelessly in the desert in search of the Fount of Life, Laylī.

Nizāmī clearly operates at the boundary of secular and mystical ethics in *Laylī and Majnūn*. Although the poet makes extensive uses of metaphors, motifs and genres derived from mysticism, at times he inserts individual lines enabling the reader to read a profane dimension into the poem. His mastery lies in his unique ability to employ a double-edged language, reinforced by ever new metaphors and an exquisite use of rhetoric figures. The poet applies this double meaning even to the theme of the story and displays the close parallel between a man desperately in love and an ascetic disciplining his ego. Both suffer insomnia, deny themselves food, avoid talking and bid farewell to everything other than the beloved. By creating an ambiguous context, he presents a story which, depending on the reader's disposition, may be interpreted at either mystical or mundane levels. Ideally, both are required.

Scholars such as J. Scott Meisami, M.W. Dols and 'A.A. Sa'īdī Sīrjānī have offered an interpretation from a purely profane point of view, which leads to results such as declaring Majnūn mad and egocentric, and Laylī a passive character who lives behind the curtain of honour. If we read the romance in relation to the Persian mystical tradition, we can see that many of Majnūn's actions and ideas can be easily justified. He is an archetypal mystic who, through severe ascetic disciplines, is trying to release himself from the world's shackles and to unite himself with the Beloved.

Nizāmī's elaboration of the mystical dimension of the story of Majnūn inspired many of his imitators to write mystical allegories. It is also certainly because of this spiritual portrayal of Majnūn that almost all subsequent authors refer to Majnūn as an archetypal mystic lover. In Persian love poetry produced after Nizāmī, Majnūn is

not portrayed as an ordinary madman; in 'Aṭṭār's writings, for instance, he is portrayed as a 'rational madman,' a wise person who consciously and sharply criticises not merely social norms but even God and His creation. In fact, as the proverb says: *'āqil nashawad har ānki majnūn nashawad*, "he who has not been a Majnūn cannot grow into a man with intellect."

Through Majnūn's complex character, Nizāmī stresses man's paradoxical nature. Majnūn's frequent meditations, his abandonment of the community of men, his relationship with Laylī, and his rejection of Laylī for her idealised version in his mind are among the issues that have always attracted people of all walks of life. Majnūn is simultaneously the king of love, a poet, a rational madman, a recluse, a chevalier, a *qalandarī* mystic, a lover of animals, a vegetarian, but he is certainly not an ideal son-in-law. It is undoubtedly because of Majnūn's controversial behaviour as well as the sort of elevated love he practises, that his love-story is regarded as the most popular poem in Islamic countries.

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INDEX

- ābā'-i 'ukwī* 285
 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān 73
 'Abd al-Wāhid ibn Zayd 11
 'Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Sa'dān 230
 Abraham 133, 177-78, 186
 Abū 'l-'Alā' Ganjawī, Nizām ad-Dīn
 (d. 554/1159) 171
 Abū Bakr (the first caliph) 83, 104
 Abū 'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (284-356/
 897-966) 53n, 82, 197
 - *Kitāb al-aghānī* 53n, 57, 82, 197
 Abū 'Imrān al-Kisrawī 239
 Abū Nuwās (d. 200/815) 273
 Abū 'l-Qāsim Ḥasan of Nayshābūr
 (d. 406/1027) 139, 145-46, 150-52
 - *'Uqalā al-majānīn* 139, 145, 150
 Abū Sa'id Abī 'l-Khayr (357-440/
 978-1061) 15n, 71, 80-81, 89n,
 91, 101-02, 107, 108n, 112n, 128n,
 133, 148, 151, 166
 - *Asrār al-tauḥīd* 81, 102, 148n, 151,
 152n, 166n
 - *Sukhanān-i manzūm* 101n-02n, 107n,
 108, 151-52, 166
 Active Intelligence 179
 adab 43, 44n
 Adam 15-6, 92n, 104, 166, 168,
 232, 259
 Āfāq 26, 156, 191, 196
 'Afrā' 64
 Afrāsiyāb 257
 Africa 27, 200, 321
 Ahrīman 173, 200-01
Akhī 29, 302
Akhī Faraj Zanjānī 29
 'aks ('antistrophe') 39, 142
Alast (the covenant of 'Am I not thy
 Lord') 15, 21, 168, 203, 259
 Alexander 27-8, 117, 122-23, 174n,
 200, 223, 235, 240, 244, 252,
 329-30, 332-33
 - romance 224
 - visits an ascetic 236
 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 41/661) 10, 93
 'Alī b. Bakkār 104
 'Alī b. Hishām 146
 allegory 58n, 332, 335
amāna ('Trust') 15, 147, 169-70, 272
 Amīr Ḥusayn Harawī 113n
 Amīr Khusrau of Delhi (651-725/
 1253-1325) 30, 38n, 51, 69, 234, 322
 - *Hasht bihisht* 30, 322
 - *Laylī and Majnūn* 38n
 Amīr Mu'izzī (d. ca. 542/1147) 72
 'Āmirī 103, 165-66, 182, 244,
 276-79, 281-84, 293, 297
 Ānāhīta 237, 239
 anaphora 37
 Anatolia 29
andarz 44-5
 Anṣārī, Shaykh 'Abdullāh
 (d. 481/1089) 21, 22n, 99, 145,
 169-70, 228-29
 - *Munājāt* 169
 - *Risāla-yi dīl u jān* 99n, 170
 - *Risāla-yi parda-yi ḥijāb* 22n, 170, 228-29
 - *Sukhanān-i pīr-i Harāt* 22n
 ant 56, 84, 125, 206, 221, 280
 antinomian mystic (see also *qalandar*)
 156, 191, 338
 Anūshīrwān 28
 Anwarī of Abīward, Aḥmad ad-Dīn
 (d. ca. 565/1169-70) 72, 221
 Aphrodite 143
 apodosis 315, 321, 325
 - apodotic 313
 Apollo 143
 Aqsunqurīd 'Alā' ad-Dīn Kurp
 Arslān 27
 Arabia 208, 288, 321
 Aragon, Louis 30
 - *Le Fou d'Elsa* 30
 Aristotle 28
 - Aristotelian 174
 al-Arrajānī 164, 277
 - *Samak 'Ayyār* 164, 277
 ascetic 54, 64, 83, 87, 89-92, 95, 97,
 102, 104, 106-09, 111, 113, 115,
 122-23, 144-45, 150-51, 159, 162,
 210, 235-36, 330, 337-38
 asceticism 4, 28, 31, 76, 89-92,
 94-6, 102, 107, 109, 113, 123, 191
 Ash'arite 167
 Āsiyya 237

- 'Aṣṣār of Tabriz (d. 779/1377) 6, 89, 164–65
 – *Mīhr u Mushṭarī* 6, 89, 164
 astrologers 6, 174
 astrology 37, 171, 174–76, 317
 astronomy 171, 174
 'Aṭṭār, Farid ad-Dīn (d. ca. 618/1221)
 10, 16n, 21, 73, 81, 92, 93n, 94,
 100, 102, 106–08, 110n, 111–12,
 131, 133, 150n, 151–53, 168, 197n,
 216n, 218, 229–30, 231n, 232,
 246n, 259n, 260, 262n, 269, 281n,
 289, 290n, 307, 332, 339
 – *Dīwān* 133n, 221n
 – *Ilāhī-nāma* 10, 73, 94n, 106, 133,
 168n, 235, 259n
 – *Manṭiq al-tayr* 17n, 73, 107n, 132,
 133, 230, 260, 307, 308n, 332
 – *Musibat-nāma* 21n, 73, 112, 123,
 150n, 151, 153n, 197n, 218,
 229n–31n, 260
 – *Mukhtār-nāma* 134, 246n
 – *Rāb'a and Biktāsh* 73, 216n
 – *Tadhkirat al-auliya'* 21n, 81, 93n, 94n,
 95n, 100, 102n, 108, 110n, 111n, 131n,
 152n, 262n, 281n, 290n, 301n
 Auf b. Sufyān 63
 'Aufī, Muḥammad b. (567–630/
 1188–1251) 7n, 123
 – *Jawāmi' al-hikāyat* 123, 136n
 Auḥādī of Marāgha 188n
 autumn 79, 87, 206, 219, 284, 323
 – autumnal garden 323–24,
 327–28
 Avesta 124
 Avicenna see Ibn Sīnā
 Ayāz 69–70
 'Ayn al-Qudāt-i Hamadānī
 (492–525/1098–1131) 16n, 94n,
 141, 153, 227n, 229, 232, 261n,
 269, 281, 300–301
 – *Apologia* 94n
 – *Nāmāhā* 300n
 Tamhīdāt 153n, 227n, 261n, 281n,
 301n
 'Ayyūqī 51n, 58, 64, 130n, 137, 188,
 189, 216, 243, 254, 294, 302, 305
 – *Warqa and Gulshāh* 1, 51n, 64, 68,
 130n, 137, 188–89, 216, 231n, 243,
 254, 294, 302, 306
 'Azza 64
 Bābā Ṭāhir of Hamadān 70, 103,
 152n, 249
 Badakhshān 285
 bad-nāmī ('ill-repute') 147, 296–97,
 300, 308
 Baghdad 55, 94n, 128, 209–10, 228
 Bahrām Gūr 67, 116–17, 124, 216,
 240, 252, 285, 288
 Bahrām Shāh 26
 Bākhārzi, Sayf ad-Dīn (d. 659/1261)
 96n, 128n
 Balkh 152
 Banū Sa'd 84
 Bārbad 28
 Barda' 117
 basil 207
 bat 148
 Bāyazīd of Bisṭām (d. 260/874) 14,
 81, 111, 105, 151, 229
 Bilqīs 125
 Bīrūnī, Abū 'l-Rayḥān 177n
 Bishr Yāsīn 165
 black man 198–200, 202, 204–05
 black stone 227
 blame (*malāmat*) 193, 232, 234, 244,
 261, 293, 297
 – *malāmatī* 91, 103, 193, 280,
 307–08, 338
 – *malāmatīyya* 156, 157n
 blossom 87, 180, 325
 bīd-i Majnūn 101
 botanical metaphor 85
 box tree 40, 86, 325, 327
 breasts 219, 222, 285, 289–90
 Bu Qubays 329
 Bundahishn 93
 Būrāq 184
 burden 15, 97, 99, 147–48, 153, 169–70
 Buthayna 64, 66, 73, 242
 Buzurgmihr 28
 Byzantine 239, 252
 camel 198, 200, 209, 327
 candle 38, 46, 108–09, 131, 190, 195,
 198, 207, 231, 242, 245–48, 262
 cave 65, 83–4, 87, 110, 117, 122–23,
 285, 314, 330–31
 chamberlain 320
 Chaucer, Geoffrey (ca. 1340–1400) 76
 chess imagery 49, 168n
 childless king 54, 164, 217, 285
 China 321
 Chrétien de Troyes 76
 Christian 237, 240
 Christian ascetic 90
 Christian girl 307
 Christian influence 269
 Christian monks 91

- Christian mysticism 331
- Christianity 90, 237
- Christoforo Armeno 30
- clothing 40, 98, 101-04, 123, 144, 271, 288, 328
- cock 318
- cow 95
- cranes 323
- creeper 96, 337
- crow 191, 196-98, 250, 314n, 323, 326
- cypress 13, 39, 60, 63, 85-7, 101, 207, 219, 225-26, 248, 264, 325, 328
- Cyrus 288, 325

- Dahhāk 34, 81, 327
- Daqīqī, Abū Maṣṣūr 220
- Darius 174, 252, 329
- date 85, 152, 174, 179, 184, 203, 219, 253, 260, 262
- date-thorn 184
- Daulatshāh 26, 29
- dawn 34, 86, 107, 111, 116, 169, 172, 178, 185, 198, 233, 245, 247, 266, 278, 318, 320-21
- ad-Daylamī, Abū 'l-Ḥasan 6, 20
- 'Atf al-alif 6, 20
- deer 117, 124, 220, 224, 258, 276, 321
- description of night 26, 189, 314, 316-17
- desert 21, 40, 54-7, 69, 85-7, 100-01, 103, 109-13, 117-18, 141, 149-50, 153, 158, 165, 181, 187, 196, 216, 229, 261, 282, 305, 311, 314, 322, 329, 330-35, 338
- Desert Fathers 335
- Dhū 'n-Nūn the Egyptian (d. 246/860) 166
- dihqān* 55-7, 60
- Dionysus 143
- divination 174-75
- ḏiwānagī* 146-47, 149, 159
- dog 30, 40, 54, 84, 120, 136, 140-41, 197, 258, 283, 296, 317
- 'the dog of the beloved's alley' 100-01, 140
- donkey 18, 95, 148-50, 153, 159, 276
- double entendre* 313
- dream 48, 107, 111, 124, 178-80, 193, 195, 204, 216

- eagle 117, 148
- elegy 83, 191, 206-07, 211, 284
- elephant 37, 49, 170, 288
- enchantment 222, 225, 291
- epigram 36n, 43n
- Eros 143
- evil eye 195-96, 278

- fairy 56, 216-18, 222, 224-25, 227, 267
- Falakī of Shirwān, Abū 'l-Niẓām Muḥammad (ca. 501-549/1107-1154) 171
- falcon 104
- Farhād and Shīrīn* 17, 67, 70, 216
- Farīdūn 288
- Farrukhī of Sīstān (d. 428/1037) 21, 25, 79, 323
- Fatāhī of Nayshābūr 164
- Fāṭima (daughter of the Prophet) 237-38
- fauna 74, 311
- fiddle 35
- Firdausī, Abū 'l-Qāsim (329-410 or 416/940-1019 or 1025) 6, 25-6, 32, 34n, 38, 44, 50-51, 58, 61, 68, 80n, 81, 116, 176n, 180, 185, 200n, 220, 223, 235, 240, 275n, 276, 288, 304, 306n, 312-15, 322
- *Bizhan and Manizha* 68, 70, 223, 235, 314
- *Shāh-nāma* 45, 51, 56, 68, 80, 116, 176n, 200n, 223, 235, 240, 275n, 276, 286, 288, 304, 306n, 312, 314-15
- *Ẓāl and Rūdāba* 67n, 68, 312
- fsurda* 18-9
- Fitna 240
- flora 74, 85, 311, 322, 328
- flora and fauna 74, 311
- flowers 33, 84-6, 260, 323, 325-28
- Forster, E.M. 75
- Fountain of Life 28, 87, 117, 242, 251, 268, 332-33, 338
- fox 108, 117-18
- francolin 326

- Gabriel 184, 263, 330
- Galen 289
- Galenic idea 272
- garden 38, 41, 55, 63, 71-2, 85-7, 96, 130, 137, 145, 178, 184, 206-07, 214, 218-19, 221, 225-26, 248, 250-51, 264, 314, 318, 322-28
- garden imagery 86, 206-07, 219, 322
- Gayūmarth 116
- gazelle 52, 73, 97, 99, 117-18, 133-34, 217, 221, 224-26, 258, 264
- ghammāz* ('telltale' or 'tattletale') 132

- Ghazālī, Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad (450-505/1058-1111) 81n, 90n-91n, 92-3, 110-11, 140, 164, 177-78, 186, 197n, 228, 232, 269, 271-73, 274n, 307
 - *Ihyā'* 92, 271-73
 - *Kimīyā-yi sa'ādat* 81n, 90n-3n, 104n-05n, 110n, 141n, 197n, 228, 271-72, 287n
 - *Mishkāt al-anwār* 177-78
 Ghazālī, Aḥmad (d. 520/1126) 3, 12-13, 15, 19, 22-23, 74, 96, 99, 104, 111-12, 140-42, 167-69, 204-05, 232, 236, 259, 266, 300, 337
 - *Rasāla-yi 'ayniyya* 300n
 - *Sawāniḥ* 3, 13, 19n, 21-2, 74, 79, 97n, 99n, 112, 127n, 141, 142n, 167-68, 204-05, 213n, 236, 259, 266n, 299n
 Ghaznawīd poets 21, 323-24
ghurāb al-bayn ('the crow of separation') 197
 gnat 148, 170
 Goethe, J.W. (1749-1832) 30
 - *West-östlicher Divan* 30
 Greek philosophy 201
 Gulshāh 130, 231n, 243, 254, 294, 302
 Gurgānī, Fakhr ad-Dīn Asad (d. ca. 448/1039) 6, 8, 25-6, 58, 71, 79, 176, 180, 185, 188-89, 202n, 204, 214n, 220, 223, 286-88, 290, 314, 322
 - *Wis and Rāmīn* 8, 17n, 26, 46, 47n, 70-1, 79, 174, 176, 188, 202n, 204, 214n, 219-20n, 223, 286-88, 314
 Ḥabīb b. Muḥammad Khālīd al-Wāsiṭī 146
 Hadewijch 331
ḥadīth qudsī 14, 127
 al-Ḥāfi, Bishr b. al-Ḥārith (d. 227/841) 102
 Ḥāfiẓ, Muḥammad Shams ad-Dīn (d. 791/1389) 16, 26, 134, 147, 158n, 170n, 189, 297n, 308n
 Hārūn ar-Rashīd (145-193/763-809) 218
 Hāfiẓ (d. 927/1520) 16, 30, 49n, 101, 118-19, 140, 141n, 154n, 165, 234, 310
 - *Laylī and Majnūn* 30, 49n, 101n, 141n, 154n, 310n
 Ḥallāj, Ḥusayn Manṣūr (d. 309/922) 11, 74, 128, 131, 134, 140, 144, 232, 301
 Hanbalite 2, 228
 harp 35-6, 72, 80, 245
 Ḥasan of Baṣra (d. 110/728) 91, 94, 289
hawās-nāma 267
 Hijāz 63
 Hippocrates 123
 homographs 40, 250, 258
 homonym 40
 homosexual love 70
 honey 29, 252, 301
 horse 35, 91, 97, 122, 133, 179, 233
 Hujwīrī, 'Alī b. 'Uthmān (d. ca. 465/1072) 12, 90, 92, 94, 102, 111, 152, 228, 259
 - *Kashf al-mahjūb* 11n, 23n, 91n, 102n, 152n, 228n, 260n, 300n
al-hūr al-'īn 221-222, 238
ḥusn-i ta'tīl ('poetic aetiology') 37
 hyacinth 326
 hyperbole (*mubālagha*) 38-40, 80, 195, 259, 312
 Iblīs (see also Satan) 104, 232, 301, 302
 - monotheist 16
 - a potential rival 16
 - pretender 16
 Ibn 'Abbādī, Ardashīr (491-548/1098-1154) 12, 13, 91n, 96
 - *Ṣūfi-nāma* 12, 91n, 96n, 128n
 Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyi ad-Dīn (d. 638/1240) 145, 150, 307
 Ibn al-Jauzī (510-597/1126-1200) 13, 128, 209
 Ibn Dabbāq 1
 - *Mashāriq anwār al-qulūb* 1, 2n
 Ibn Dāwūd of Iṣfahān (255-298/868-910) 2, 128
 - *Kitāb al-zahra* 2
 Ibn Hazm (348-456/994-1064) 154n
 Ibn Qutayba, 'Abdullāh b. Muslim al-Dīnawarī (213-276/828-889) 52n, 161, 187, 218, 303, 310
 - *Kitāb ash-shi'r* 52n, 57, 161, 187, 197, 303
 Ibn Salām 41-2, 52-3, 75, 87, 96, 171-72, 184, 199, 202, 205, 213-15, 224, 241, 243, 247, 250-56, 263-64, 271, 277, 296-97, 318
 Ibn Sīnā (370-428/980-1037) 5, 7, 204n, 287, 289-90
 Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. 161/778) 152
iḥrām 227, 229, 233-34

- ikhtiyār* ('free will') 167-70, 292
ikhwān aṣ-ṣafā' ('Brethren of Purity') 6
iltizām ('poetic obligation') 17n, 34, 220n, 312
 imagery 31, 33, 35-6, 50, 82, 84, 86, 91, 99, 131, 133, 137, 167, 192, 206-07, 213, 221, 226, 234, 246-47, 249, 320
 imitations (*naẓīras*) 68, 143
 Imrū' al-Qays 273
 India 27, 37
 infant 80, 193, 272-73, 287
 insect 125, 148, 221, 280
 'Irāqī, Fakhr ad-Dīn (d. 688/1289) 10, 128, 133, 188n
 - *'Ushshāq-nāma* 133, 188n
 - *Lama'āt* 129
irsāl al-mathal ('reasoning by illustration and analogy') 36-7, 46
 Ismā'īl 71, 133 34
 d'Israeli, Isaac 30
- Jacob 277-78
jādū (see also magic) 195, 223-25
jām-i Jam ('Cup of Jamshīd') 235, 268
jam' wa taqsim ('combination and division') 70
 Jamāl Khalīl Shirwānī 107, 111, 113n, 246n, 297
Nuzhat al-majālis 16n, 19n, 107n, 111, 133n, 161n, 246n, 260n, 281n, 297, 308n
 Jamālī of Delhi (862 971/1483-1536) 6, 67, 164, 216, 262, 285
Mīhr u Māh 6, 164, 216n, 285
 - *Mir'āt al-ma'ānī* 262
 Jāmī, 'Abd ar-Rahmān (d. 898/1492) 20, 30, 32n, 52n, 101n, 143, 150n, 154, 164, 196, 202, 234, 261n, 287
 - *Ashī'at al-lama'āt* 128n
 - *Laylī and Majnūn* 30, 143
 - *Salamān and Absāl* 164, 202, 287
 - *Yūsuf and Zūlaykhā* 19, 216, 288
 Jamīl b. 'Abdullāh b. Ma'mar 64
 jasmine 86, 264, 291, 326-27
jawān-mardī 299-302, 304-05
 Jesus 94, 105, 276
 and the dead dog 30, 140, 197n
 jinn 84, 222
 Job 22
 Jones, Sir William (1746-1794) 30, 58n 59n
 Joseph (see also Yūsuf) 32, 277-78
 Judgement Day 32n, 233, 256n, 281, 318
- Junayd, Abū 'l-Qāsim b. Muḥammad (d. 298/910) 128, 166
 Jupiter 6, 164, 177-78, 316
- Ka'ba* ('House of God') 18, 52, 82, 149, 227 34, 258, 261, 268-69, 278, 300, 307, 332, 337
 - *ka'ba-yi dil* 229
 - *ka'ba-yi gil* 229
 Kalābādī, Abū Bakr (d. ca. 380/990) 12
 Kan'ān 278
 Kāshānī, 'Izz ad-Dīn Maḥmūd (d. 735/1334-5) 18n, 74n, 92n, 94n, 102n, 259n
 - *Kunūz al-asrār* 19n, 74n, 259n
 - *Mishbāh al-hidāya* 92n, 94n, 102n
 Kay Kāwūs, 'Unsur al-Ma'ālī (412-92/1021-98) 8-9, 67-68, 271, 273-75, 286-87, 293, 305
 - *Qābūs-nāma* 7, 8-9n, 67-8, 271, 273-75n, 287n, 305
 Kay Khusrau 116, 124, 257
 Khājū of Kirmān, Abū 'l-'Aṭā Kamāl ad-Dīn Maḥmūd (d. ca. 742/1341-42) 10, 51n, 74, 106n, 164-65, 216, 237, 285, 286n, 306n
 - *Dīwān* 106n
 - *Gul and Naurūz* 164, 216, 285
 - *Humā and Humāyūn* 51n, 216, 285, 286n, 306n
 - *Kamāl-nāma* 10
khāmūshī 104
 Khāqānī of Shirwān (d. 545/1199) 35n, 72, 82, 171, 227
 Kharaqānī, Abū 'l-Ḥasan (d. 450/1034) 74n, 105
 - *Nūr al-'ulūm* 74n, 105n
khayāl 48, 53, 204-05, 323
 Khiūr 179, 242, 251, 268, 332 33
 Khusruw Parwīz II 26, 28, 77, 124
 kingship 4, 56-7, 113, 115-17, 119, 121-22, 124, 162, 231
 Koran 15, 39-40, 76-7, 81, 97, 100, 116, 124-25, 135-36, 148, 154, 162, 169, 175, 177-78, 198, 222, 238, 263, 272 73, 277-78, 280, 287, 307, 317, 330, 332
 Kurd 149-50, 159
kushta-yi or *sūkhta-yi ma'shūq* 130
 Kuthayyir b. 'Abd ar-Rahmān al-Khuzā'ī 64
- labbayk* 227, 229, 233
 leopard 118

- letter symbolism 235, 265
 lily 326
 lion 81, 92, 111–12, 117–18, 149,
 162, 208, 224, 250, 283, 335
 liver 155, 181, 195, 198, 207, 247,
 278, 282, 289
locus amoenus 325
 love
 – as an affliction (*balā*) 21–3
 – as attraction 17
 – as the axis of the universe 10
 – as a cannibal 99
 – creation myth based on 14
 – as a divine mania 6
 – as an ethical concept 7
 – falling in love 46, 54, 67, 71, 168,
 213, 215–16, 222, 225, 271, 273
 – as a force 5, 168
 – Greek ideas on 5
 – as illness 7
 – Jewish ideas 6n
 – Koranic words for 11–12
 – as lightning 282
 – love-death 4, 127–28
 – love-madness 4, 64, 69, 146
 – love-sickness 7, 79–80
 – metaphorical 19–20
 – mystical concept of 10, 12–3, 31,
 73, 113, 115, 141, 170, 236, 267, 306
 – passionate love 9, 146, 209, 211,
 258, 267, 288
 – profane 1, 13, 19, 31, 72, 100
 – as a serious pastime 27
 – symptoms of 7, 79
 – as an urge 5
 Lubnā 64, 187, 197
 Luqmān 148, 151
 lute 36

 madmen 143, 149–53, 157, 262, 331
 Magi 116
 magic (see also *jādū*) 31, 148, 153,
 218, 223–25
 magical spell 202
 – *qfūn* ('incantation') 184, 199–200,
 202, 222, 225
 Mahīn Bānū 256–57
 Mālik Dīnār 95, 100
 Mānī 237
 Manichaeism 237
 Manuchihr (Shirwānshāh's son) 276
 Manuchihrī of Dāmghān (d. ca. 432/
 1042 41) 70, 72, 96, 197, 260, 323,
 327n
 Maktabī 51, 234

 Mars 177n
 martyr 66, 96, 127–29, 131, 135–36,
 138
 martyrdom 64, 127–30, 136–38
 Ma'rūf Karkhī 91
 Marw 43n, 54–55, 120, 140, 317
 Mary 238–39
 Maryam 240, 252, 256n
maṣlaḥa ('best interest') 41, 163–64,
 166–67, 178, 185, 277, 282
 Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmān (d. ca. 525/1131)
 72, 221
 al-Mas'ūdī (d. 957) 6
 – *Murūj adh-dhahab* 66n
 Maubad 8, 176, 286
 Maybudī, Rashīd ad-Dīn Aḥmad
 (d. 520/1126) 130, 287, 317, 330n
 Mecca 53, 71, 83, 170, 228–30, 234,
 238, 268
 Medina 83, 238, 303, 330
 Meister Eckhart 331
 Mercury 6
 metaphor 31–33, 35, 77, 85, 87, 91,
 96, 98, 104, 218, 120, 129, 243,
 246–47, 266, 275–78, 282, 291,
 312, 315, 320–22, 324, 330–31,
 333, 335–36
 – metaphor of true and false pearl
 19–20
 metonymy 13, 33–5
 – metonymic 312, 315, 336
 Middle Persian 44n, 180, 222, 237
mīhrāb ('niche') 227, 233
 Mihrigān 322–23
 milk 80, 94, 117, 173, 193, 272,
 285–91
 – effect of 272, 286, 289–90
mī'rāj ('Ascension') 37, 58, 183–84,
 260, 263
 mirror 7, 14, 31–2, 71, 129, 175,
 190, 199, 234–36, 248, 266–67,
 291, 321–22
 moon 6, 38, 42, 80, 83, 86, 135,
 170, 177, 182, 195, 203–04, 216,
 218, 223, 226, 251, 253, 257, 259,
 278, 291, 296, 315
 Moses 11, 81, 148, 151, 259, 264, 332
 moth 21, 185, 195, 213, 242,
 246–47, 316, 318
 Mount Qāf 29, 332
 Mount Sinai 170, 259, 332
 mouse 149, 185
 Muḥammad (Nizāmī's son) 77, 275
mukarrar (or *takrīr* 'repetition') 39–40,
 142

- al-Muraqqash al-Asghar 63
 al-Muraqqash al-Akbar 63
 Muse 56, 143
 Mustamlī Bukhārī, Ibrāhīm Ismā'īl b.
 Muḥammad (d. 434/1042) 74, 81,
 92n, 94, 96, 102, 105, 152, 163,
 166, 230
 - *Sharḥ at-ta'arruf* 92n, 94n-96n, 102,
 105n, 128n, 152n, 163n, 166n, 230n
mulaḍādd ('antithesis') 39, 142
 Mu'tazilites 163-64, 167

 Nāgaurī, Ḥamīd ad-Dīn (d. 673/1274)
 74, 107, 131, 168-69, 281
 - *Lauwā'ih* 16n, 22n, 74n, 96n, 107n,
 131n, 168, 169n, 281, 282n
nām u nang 308
 Najm ad-Dīn Dāya (d. 618/1221)
 14-5, 92n, 102n, 104n, 108, 111,
 170, 285-87, 299, 300
 Mirṣād al-'ibād 92n, 102n, 108n,
 170n, 282n
 - *Risāla-yi 'aql u 'ishq* 282n
 Nakhjawānī, Aḥmad 22, 95
 - *Tariq at-tahqīq* 95
 Nāmiqī, Aḥmad Jām (d. 536/1141)
 12, 96, 107, 112, 147
 - *Rauḍat al-mudhannibīn* 128n, 147
 - *Uns at-tā'ibīn* 12n, 96n, 107n, 112n,
 128n
 narcissus 33, 81, 221, 245, 327-28
 Nasafī, 'Azīz ad-Dīn (d. ca. 680/1282)
 90n, 91, 148, 169, 232
 Nāṣir Khusruw (d. ca. 465 70/1072-77)
 71-2
 - *Dīwān* 72n
 Safar-nāma 71
 Nau Rūz 320-22
 Naufal 5, 52-4, 75, 86, 103, 106,
 141, 173, 182-83, 213, 224n, 245,
 260, 296-97, 302-06, 308-10, 329
 Naufal b. Muṣāhiq 303
 Near East 129, 188, 239, 324
 Negro 201
 neologisms 32
 night 22, 26, 33-4, 36-7, 39, 49, 63,
 92, 98, 107-09, 112, 153, 172,
 176-77, 182, 185, 196-97, 203-04,
 219, 226, 250-51, 254-55, 257,
 260-61, 265-66, 278-79, 284, 291,
 306, 311, 314-18, 320-21
 - as a test for the lover 316
 nightingale 104, 197, 248, 323-26
 Nizāmī-yi 'Arūdī 7n
 - *Chahār-maqāla* 7n

 Nizāmī Ganjawī, Ilyās b. Yūsuf
 (ca. 540-605/1146-1209)
 - *Dīwān* 26, 27n, 82n, 131n, 219n,
 221n
 - *Haft paykar* 27-31, 58, 67, 124,
 175n, 176, 240-41, 243, 252, 257,
 285, 288, 313, 324
 - *Iqbāl-nāma* 27, 44, 163n, 196n
 - *Iskandar-nāma* 27, 329
 - *Khamṣa* 26, 58, 74, 76, 286
 - *Khulāṣa-yi khamṣa* 43
 - *Khusrau and Shirin* 17, 18n, 26, 28,
 31, 49, 56, 58, 67-70, 78, 129,
 162n, 163n, 174-76, 184, 185n,
 187, 189, 202n, 214, 216, 220n,
 223, 243, 249n, 252, 256n, 257n,
 267, 269, 281, 285, 302, 317, 324
 - *Laylī and Majnūn* 3, 18-9, 25n,
 26-30, 31n, 33-4, 36, 43n, 49-50,
 52, 53n, 54-56, 57n, 61, 63-4,
 69-74, 78, 80, 82, 86, 90, 95, 101,
 103, 122-24, 128-30, 137, 140-41,
 143, 150, 154, 161-62, 164-65,
 171-73, 175, 180, 184, 186, 189,
 194, 196, 210, 213-16, 218, 227,
 231, 234, 241-44, 246, 252, 254,
 258, 261, 265, 267-69, 271, 275,
 281, 290, 295-96, 302-03, 306,
 313, 317, 324, 329-32, 335,
 337-38
 Makhzan al-asrār 14, 26, 30, 40n,
 44, 46, 51, 62, 89, 91-2n, 99, 104,
 108, 117n, 121-22, 140-41, 162,
 175, 182, 184, 197n-98n, 281
 - *Sharaf-nāma* 25n, 27-8, 31n, 56, 58,
 77, 122, 123n, 137, 164n, 173,
 174n, 176, 184n, 200, 202n, 235,
 236n, 241n, 244n, 252, 257, 330
 Noah 151, 278
 Nu'mān 288
 Nūrī, Abū 'l-Ḥusayn (226-295/
 840-907) 11
 Nūshāba 117, 240, 257

 Ohrmazd 173
 onager 118
 orchard 85, 130, 137, 226
 owl 197-98

 palm 325
 Paradise 54, 60, 66, 86, 92n-93n,
 124, 129, 219, 221, 225-26, 238,
 292, 316, 322-25
parda ('veil'; also see veil) 38, 170,
 228-29, 244-45, 322

- pari* (also see fairy) 48, 222–25, 333
 Parthian 26, 204, 237
 partridge 56, 124–125, 174, 220, 250, 280, 323
 pearl 19, 29, 35, 38, 40, 52, 55, 78, 93, 137, 155, 250, 279, 292, 294–95, 315, 318, 325, 333
 Persian romance 54, 66–8, 124, 130, 146, 188, 202, 227, 323
 pheasant 248n
 pilgrim 82, 137, 210, 227–30, 233–34, 268
 – pilgrimage 66, 170, 227, 229–30, 233–34
 – of love 311, 331
 Pisces 315
 plane-tree 326
 planets 5, 6, 17, 171, 174, 186, 316
 Plato 5, 9, 123, 143–44, 281
 – efflux theory of vision 20
 – Platonic love 63
 Pleiades 317–18
poeta doctus 37, 174
 poetical figures 37, 40, 70, 220, 259, 312
 poison 22, 39, 50, 167
 polo-play 68, 241
 pomegranate 85, 165, 325
 Preserved Tablet 166, 185, 235
 Prophet Muḥammad 83, 90, 125, 129, 151, 183–84, 237, 239, 260, 263, 267, 272, 330
 protasis 313, 315, 320–21, 325
 Puccini 29–30
 – *Turandot* 29–30
 pun 233, 291, 321, 332
- qalandar* 156–57, 193
 – *qalandaris* 103
 – *qalandariyyāt* 191
 – *qalandarī* mystics 338–39
 Qays b. Dharīh 64, 187, 197
 qibla 227, 233, 269
 Qifchāq 244
 Qubays 329
 Qushayrī, Abū 'l-Qāsim (d. 465/1072) 12, 73, 102, 166, 299
- Rabī' b. 'Adnān 254, 306
 Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya (d. 185/801) 40n, 94, 100, 110, 229, 230n, 281
 – and the thirsty dog 40, 141
 Rābi'a b. Kalb Quzdārī 21, 70
 Raushanak (Roxana) 252
 raven 33, 54, 87, 198, 225–26
- Rāzī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā' (250–313 or 323/854–925 or 935) 273
 Rāzī, Yaḥyā b. Mu'adh (d. 258/871) 94, 111, 151
 Reeve, William 30
 – opera *Kais, or Love in the Desert* 30
 Rhazes see Rāzī
 ring-dove 225, 326
 rival 195, 230, 256, 306
 rose 33, 35, 38–9, 47, 80, 84–7, 111, 113, 139, 149, 171, 178, 199, 203, 207, 219, 221, 226, 245, 248, 251–52, 256, 258, 264, 280, 291, 323, 325–28
 Rūdāba 68, 312, 313
 Rūdakī 21n, 70, 285
 Rūmī, Maulānā Jalāl ad-Dīn (d. 672/1273) 3, 7n, 19n, 20, 73–4, 81n, 105, 133, 134, 139n, 204, 216n, 218n, 228n–29n, 239, 260, 322
 – *Fihī mā fihī* 74n, 216n, 218n
 – *Mathnawī-yi ma'nawī* 7n, 19n, 74n, 81, 133n, 139n, 204n, 218n, 229n, 261n
 Rustam 67, 288
 Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 606/1209) 6n, 14n, 20, 90, 105, 140, 170, 232, 259, 281, 290
 – *'Abhar al-'āshiqīn* 6n, 20, 90n, 105, 115n
 – *Sharḥ-i shafīyyāt* 14n, 74n, 108n, 281n
- Sa'dī, Muṣliḥ ad-Dīn (d. ca. 692/1293) 16, 30n, 73–4, 106n, 218n, 300, 322
 – *Būstān* 300n
 – *Gulistān* 74n, 106n, 218n, 322
Safā and Marwāh 233
 Šafī, Maulānā Fakhr ad-Dīn 'Alī 150n
 Sāliḥ 198
sāqī 59, 137
sāqī-nāma 59, 137
 Salām of Baghdād 54, 75, 99, 100, 106, 110, 115, 119, 156, 209–11, 225
 salamandar 300
 Salīm 98, 103, 122
 Salīm-i 'Āmirī (Majnūn's uncle) 98, 103
samā' 134, 209
 Sanā'ī, Majdūd ad-Dīn Ādam (d. 525/1131) 3, 13, 18, 20, 22n, 25, 26, 44, 56, 58, 61, 73, 90n, 106, 129, 132, 140, 156, 168, 179, 194, 205, 218, 232, 259n, 332
 – *Diwān* 259n

- *Ḥaḍīqat al-ḥaqīqa* 18, 20n, 26, 56, 73, 90n, 132, 148n, 168n
- *Sanā'i-ābād* 132
- *Sayr al-'ibād* 179, 194
- Sarrāj, Abū Naṣr (d. 378/988) 12, 136, 228, 299-300
- Satan (see also Iblīs) 16, 93, 232, 273
- Saturn 6, 177n
- Sayyid Ḥasan Ghaznawī 80
- serpent 34, 81, 200, 253, 327n, 331
- Seven Sleepers 40, 330
- Shabistārī, Maḥmūd (d. 720/1320) 13
- *Gulshan-i rāz* 13
- Shāh Shujā' of Kirmān 108
- Shāh u gadā* ('the king and the beggar') 134
- Shahīd of Balkh (d. 324/936) 21
- Shahr-Bānū 68
- Shahriyār, Muḥammad Ḥusayn 182n-83n
- Shahrū 286
- Shakar 240, 250, 257, 317
- Shakespeare, William (1564-1616) 27
- *Romeo and Juliet* 27
- Shāpur 223
- Shaykh San'ān 307-08
- sheep 117
- shell 137, 252, 292, 315
- Shi'ism 237-38
- Shi'ite 167
- ash-Shiblī, Abū Bakr (d. 334/945) 23, 108n, 111, 229
- Shirwānshāh Akhsitān, Abū 'l-Muẓaffar 27-8, 59, 77, 121-22, 124, 275-76
- Simurgh 28, 288, 332
- Siyāwush 216, 288
- snake (see also serpent) 80 4, 87, 162, 245, 252
- Solomon 115, 116n, 117, 124-25, 130, 135-36
- stag 118
- stars 6, 33, 37, 148, 171, 174, 176-78, 182 83, 185-86, 191, 218, 315 20
- Sterne, L. 43n
- *Tristram Shandy* 43n
- Sūdāba 216, 288
- Sufism 44, 64, 69, 81, 90-1, 100, 108, 128, 134, 140, 156-57, 168, 172, 301
- Suhrawardī, Shihāb ad-Dīn (d. 587/1191) 96, 99n, 176, 179, 281, 235, 325n, 333-34
- *'Aql-i surkh* 99n, 179, 325n
- *Hikmat al-ishrāq* 176
- *Mūnis al-'ushshāq* 96, 281n
- suicide 67, 119, 127, 129
- sukūt nazẓār* ('silent onlookers') 105
- as-Sulamī of Nayshābūr, 'Abd ar-Raḥmān (330-412/942-1021) 299
- Sulaymān Dārānī 91, 95
- Sulṭān Maḥmūd 70
- Sumnūn the Lover (d. 287/900) 21
- sun 6, 32-3, 46, 90, 92, 86, 119, 148, 170, 177, 195-96, 250-51, 257, 312-13, 319-22
- Sūrābādī, Abū Bakr 177
- Surrealist movement 30
- Syria 243, 294, 302
- Ṭā'if 71
- ṭajāhul al-'arīf* ('feign ignorance') 256
- talbiya* 233
- talisman 172, 225
- talmih* ('allusion') 39 40
- tanāsūb* or *murā'āt-i nazīr* ('congruence of poetic ideas') 38-9
- Tarsūsī, Abū Ṭāhir 'Alī b. Mūsā 83, 200, 289
- ṭawāf* 227, 233
- Thamūd 198
- Theatre Royal Drury Lane 30
- thorn 87, 94, 104, 179, 184, 282, 291, 323, 325
- The Thousands and One Nights* 164, 216
- treasure 41, 46, 57, 81-3, 87, 156, 197, 210, 220, 242-43, 250, 252-53, 276, 330
- Tristan 76
- Troilus 76
- Tughril II 26
- turbat* 234
- turtle-dove 326
- tulip 85-6, 207, 264, 291, 325
- Ṭūsī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad 239
- *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt* 239
- Ṭūsī, Naṣīr ad-Dīn 109n, 110, 177, 201, 271, 273, 286 89
- *Āghāz wa anjām* 177n
- *Akhlaq-i Nasīrī* 271
- *Tasawwurat* 201
- 'Udhrite romance 4, 63, 66, 68, 154, 161, 205, 216, 261, 268, 329
- beloved 65, 68
- love 63, 66, 144, 197, 237, 242, 254, 261, 268, 302, 305

- lover 64-7, 73, 75, 232, 242, 263
- poetry 64-5, 76, 78
- tradition 232
- ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb 10, 93
- Umm Salama 289-90
- ummahāt-i arba‘a* 285
- Universal Reason 179
- Universal Soul 179
- ‘Unṣurī 323
- ‘Urwa b. Hizām 64
- Uways of Qaran 151-53

- vegetarian 87, 94, 101, 339
- vegetarianism 92-8
- veil (also see *parda*) 101-02, 130, 148, 154-55, 244-45, 248, 325, 327
- Venice 29
- Venus 6, 177-78, 316
- vernal garden 71, 323, 325
- violet 85, 149, 180, 219, 325
- Virgin Mary 237, 239
- Virgins of Light 237

- Wahshī Bāfiqī, Kamāl ad-Dīn 17n, 67, 164-65, 218n, 231n, 285
- *Nāẓir u Manẓūr* 164
- *Shirīn and Farhād* 218n, 231n
- al-Wālibī, Abū Bakr 143, 218, 223n
- *Diwān* 143, 223n
- Wāmiq and ‘Adhrā’* 9, 69, 70
- Warqa 130n, 216n, 294, 302, 306
- water-lily 325, 327
- Weepers (*bakkā’ūn*) 116n, 280

- wet-nurse 80, 173, 284-91
- hiring 272, 287
- wine 13, 28, 35, 46, 48, 50, 62, 92, 103, 134, 137, 203, 231, 245, 257, 260-61, 263, 273, 307, 314, 320, 324, 326
- Wīrū 174
- wolf 108, 117-18, 196
- worm 82, 279

- Xerxes 288

- Yazdgird I 288
- Yemen 294
- Yūnus 108
- Yūsuf 19-20, 32, 69, 71, 216, 259-60, 278, 288, 301

- Zāl 67-8, 288
- Zangī Bukhārī, Muḥammad 16n, 96n
- Zanzibar 201
- Zayd 54, 63, 75, 86, 124, 158, 206, 210-11, 244, 256, 264
- Zaynab 54, 75, 244
- Zaynab bint ‘Alī 238
- Zephyr 75, 193-94, 224n
- Zhanda Pīl see Nāmiqī
- Zoroastrianism 93, 172, 201, 237
- Zoroastrian concept of heaven 171
- Zoroastrians 289
- Zulaykhā 3, 9, 19, 20n, 69, 71, 216, 259
- Zurvanism 172-73

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